

The Modernized Alekhine Defense

Christian
Bauer



Thinkers Publishing

Table of Contents

Title page

Key to Symbols

Preface

Chapter 1 – Alternatives on move 2

Variations a-b

Variations c-d

Chapter 2 – Alternatives on move 3

Variations a-f

Variations g-j

Chapter 3 – Four Pawns Attack

Variations a-c

Variations d-f

Chapter 4 – Exchange Variation with 5...exd6

Variations a-d

Variations e-g

Chapter 5 – Exchange Variation with 5...cxd6

Variations a-c

Variations d-g

Variations h-l

Chapter 6 – Modern Variation with 4...--

Variations a-c

Variations d-f

Chapter 7 – Modern Variation with 4...g6

Variations a-c

Variations d-e

Variations f-i

Chapter 8 – Modern Variation with 4...dxe5

Variations a-d

Variations e-g

Variations h-k

Variations l-o

Chapter 9 – Modern Variation with 4...Bg4

Variations a-d

Variations e-h

Variations i-l

Chapter 10 – Bonus Lines

Variations a-d

Variations e-h

Variations i-l

Chapter 11 – Exercises

Exercises 1-23

Exercises 24-46

The Modernized Alekhine Defense

by

Christian Bauer

Thinkers Publishing 2021



www.thinkerspublishing.com

First edition 2021 by Thinkers Publishing Copyright © 2021 Christian Bauer All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior written permission from the publisher.

All sales or enquiries should be directed to Thinkers Publishing, 9850 Landegem, Belgium.

Email: info@thinkerspublishing.com Website:

www.thinkerspublishing.com

Managing Editor: Romain Edouard **Assistant Editor:** Daniël

Vanheirzeele **Proofreading:** Bernard Carpinter **Software:** Hub van de Laar

Cover Design: Iwan Kerkhof **Graphic Artist:** Philippe Tonnard

Production: BESTinGraphics **ISBN:** 9789464201185

D/2021/13730/15

Key to Symbols

! a good move

? a weak move

!! an excellent move

?? a blunder

!? an interesting move

?! a dubious move

TM only move

N novelty

‰ lead in development

⊙ zugzwang

= equality

∞ unclear position

© with compensation for the sacrificed material

2 White stands slightly better

3 Black stands slightly better

± White has a serious advantage

μ Black has a serious advantage

+– White has a decisive advantage

–+ Black has a decisive advantage

, with an attack

f with initiative

„ with counterplay

... with the idea of

1 better is

\leq worse is

+ check

mate

Preface

When Thinkers Publishing suggested I could try to produce a book on the Alekhine Defense, since for some reason I seem to have the reputation of using maverick openings, this idea looked reasonable. In that Covid period I had nothing better to do after all! After a few months I however realized that Thinkers Publishing had passed me a hot potato (many thanks!), i.e. the arduous task of checking the serious recent works of Kornev and Negi, plus the mammoth book of Chetverik and Kalinichenko, not to mention some “already ancient” suggestions from John Shaw dated 2016!

You will therefore find some references to those inspiring sources throughout this book (Chetverik & Kalinichenko being abbreviated to C&K).

I wasn't sure at first whether I wanted to talk about “all existing” lines of this intriguing opening, and discovered in the process there were quite a few, or whether I would sort them out to offer a Black repertoire. I finally decided on the first approach, to give you, dear reader, a broader choice. Among all the lines included in that book, the Four Pawns Attack Classical, covered in the Bonus Lines chapter, is probably the only one where a Black player would need more knowledge in order to be “safe” from a theoretical standpoint.

Hope you'll enjoy reading this book!

Chapter 1

Alternatives on move 2

1.e4 Nf6

Chapter Guide

Chapter 1 – Alternatives on move 2

In this chapter we will examine secondary options by White on move 2 as well as 1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Ng8.

1.e4 Nf6

a) 2.d3

b) 2.Nc3 d5 3.e5 --

c) 2.Nc3 d5 3.e5 Nfd7

d) 2.e5 Ng8

a) 2.d3

1.e4 Nf6 2.d3



Position after: 2.d3

With 2.d3 White chickens out from entering the Alekhine proper, indicating that he is obviously not trying hard to get an opening edge. Black has several ways to follow up, depending on his tastes. I'd suggest 2...d5, since Alekhine players shouldn't be afraid of 3.e5, should they? Here you see a mixture of some quite fresh and older examples: 2...d5

A) 2...e5 shouldn't really have any independent value, since play will almost certainly transpose into some minor line of 1.e4 e5. Or to my recommendation, if after 2...d5 White decides on 3.Nd2 Black can happily play 3...e5, getting a good 1.e4 e5 position. After 2...e5 3.f4?! White is already playing with fire, since with 3...exf4 4.Bxf4 Nc6 followed by 5...d5 Black can nourish the hope of seizing the initiative. 3.Nf3 [3.Nc3 Bc5 4.g3 a6 5.Bg2 d6 6.Nge2 Nc6= Azmaiparashvili, Z (2673) –

Minasian, A (2595) Montecatini Terme 2000 transposed into the Vienna opening 1.e4 e5 2.Nc3 Nf6 3.g3 and so on] 3...Nc6 4.Be2 d5 [4...g6 5.c4 Bg7 6.Nc3 0-0 7.h3 d6 8.Be3 Re8 9.Qd2 Nd7 Ponkratov, P (2630) – Gupta, A (2608) chess.com (rapid) 2020] 5.Nbd2



Position after: 5.Nbd2

Playing a reversed Philidor (thus one tempo up compared to that opening as Black), White should be equal here, but he runs the risk of landing in an overly passive position.

A1) In Haub, T (2427) – Bauer, C (2622) Vandoeuvre 2004, I chose 5...Bc5. 6.0-0 0-0 7.c3 a5 8.a4 [8.b3!? Intending a2-a3, then either Rb1 or Bb2 followed by b3-b4. If 8...d4 then 9.cxd4 Nxd4 10.Bb2 is known to be around equal with reversed colors.] 8...Re8 9.h3 Ba7



Position after: 9...Ba7

10.Re1 [Here or on the next move 10.exd5 followed by Nc4 would have been more active; see the note after 5.Nbd2.] 10...h6 11.Bf1?! Be6 12.b3 Qd7 13.Bb2 Rad8 14.Qb1 Nh5 15.b4 dxe4 16.dxe4 Nf4 17.b5



Position after: 17.b5

17...Bxh3!! The black army is fully mobilized, with its mighty dark-squared bishop eyeing f2 and the rooks ready to join the assault along the sixth rank. 18.gxh3 Nxh3+ 19.Kh2 Nf4 20.bxc6 Qg4+ Bringing the heavy artillery nearer the white king, whose situation is already hopeless. 21.Re3 Re6 22.Nd4 Qh4+ 23.Kg1 exd4 24.cxd4 Rg6+ 25.Rg3 Rxd3+ 26.fxd3 Qxd3+ 27.Kh1 Qh4+ 28.Kg1 Rxd4 White resigned.

A2) 5...g6 6.0-0 Bg7 7.c3 a5 8.a4 [As in Haub – Bauer seen under 5...Bc5, White should seriously have considered 8.b3 0-0 9.a3 if only for

the sake of having a clear and constructive plan to follow.] 8...0-0 9.Re1 Re8 10.Bf1



Position after: 10.Bf1

This position was reached in Todorcevic, M (2535) – Tal, M (2610) Marseille 1989. Being an adept of King's Indian systems, the French-Yugoslavian GM probably didn't mind playing the white side here. When an opportunity presented itself a few moves later, however, the Magician of Riga didn't miss it! 10...b6 11.exd5 Nxd5³ 12.Qb3 Nf4 13.Ne4 Be6 14.Qc2 Nd5 15.g3 h6 16.Bg2 Qd7 17.Ned2 Rad8 18.Nc4



Position after: 18.Nc4

18...Ndb4! 19.cxb4 Nxb4 20.Qc3?! [20.Qe2 would have limited the damage and the same goes for 21.Bf1 on the next move.] 20...Qxd3 21.Na3?! [21.Bf1 Qxc3 22.bxc3 Nc2_μ] 21...e4 Black was winning and duly converted his edge.

B) 2...c5 3.f4 Nc6 4.g4



Position after: 4.g4

This occurred in Ponkratov, P (2630) – Markus, R (2599) chess.com (rapid) 2020, where White's creative handling of the opening was probably motivated by the time control. At any rate it's fun to watch! 4...h6 5.h3 d5 6.e5 Nd7 7.Bg2 Nb6 [7...g5!? in order to blow apart the white center.] 8.Nc3 h5 9.gxh5 Bf5 10.Nce2 e6[∞]



Position after: 10...e6[∞]

Black could claim a very sound position strategically, even though the outcome was still very much open.

3.e5

3.Nd2 dxe4 [Black is again spoilt for choice and 3...c5 is by no means worse, e.g. 4.g3 dxe4 5.dxe4 Nc6 6.Bg2 g6 7.Ngf3 Bg7 8.0-0 0-0 9.Qe2 e5 10.c3 Qc7∞ Artemiev, V (2691) – Bortnyk, O (2610) World Blitz Ch Riyadh 2017.] 4.dxe4 e5 5.Ngf3 Bd6 6.g3 b6!



Position after: 6...b6!

This position is usually reached via 1.e4 1...e6 2.d3 d5 3.Nd2 Nf6 4.g3 dxe4 5.dxe4 e5 and so on. Black is supposed to be doing fine there, despite having lost a tempo on ...e7-e6 and then ...e6-e5. With his last move Black intends to disturb his opponent's standard development. 7.Bg2 Ba6 8.c4 This weakens the d4-square forever, but otherwise White couldn't castle. 8...0-0 9.0-0



Position after: 9.0-0

9...Nbd7 [9...c5!? and then 10...Nc6 came into consideration, especially if one knows how things developed later on in the game.] 10.a3 Bb7 11.Qc2 a5 12.b3 Nc5 13.Re1 Ne6 14.Bb2 Nd7 15.Nf1 c5 16.Ne3 Nd4 17.Qd3 a4∞ Nakamura, H – Degraeve, JM chess.com (rapid) 2018.

3...Nfd7 4.d4 c5 5.c3 Nc6



Position after: 5...Nc6

At this juncture White has to make up his mind between 6.Nf3 and 6.f4. In both cases Black will then decide whether he wants his light-squared bishop out of the pawn chain or if he satisfies himself with a good version of a French Defense. A matter of taste again, but I'd advocate the more ambitious "bishop out of the pawn chain" approach.

6.Nf3

6.f4

A) 6...e6 7.Nf3 Qb6



Position after: 7...Qb6

A1) 8.a3 was used in Maljutin, E – Fedorov, A, Moscow 1992, the only clash between two players rated over 2400 where the position after 6...e6 was discussed. Black replied with the sensible 8...a5, stopping b2-b4 first before focusing on his own active play linked with the undermining ...f7-f6.

A2) 8.g3 Be7 [Starting with 8...f6 gives White the extra option of 9.Bd3, the d4-pawn then being taboo in view of the check on g6.] 9.Bh3 f6!



Position after: 9...f6!

I'd rather be Black here because 10.Bxe6 cxd4 11.cxd4 [11.Bxd7+ Bxd7 gives Black tremendous compensation on the light squares for the pawn] 11...Ndx5! and 10.0-0 cxd4 11.cxd4 fxe5 12.fxe5 Ndx5 13.Nxe5 Nxe5 14.Nc3 Nf7³ both seem to turn in his favor.

B) 6...cxd4 7.cxd4 Nb6 8.Nc3 Bf5 9.g4



Position after: 9.g4

Now 9...Be4 10.Nxe4 dxe4 11.Bg2 is messy, but the retreat 9...Bd7 is quite interesting. White will likely not manage to find a safe shelter for his king and he may well regret his last impetuous pawn thrust.

6...e6

After this move the position is transformed into the Advance variation of the French Defense. The only difference is the position of the black knight on d7 instead of g8. This fact seems to favor Black, who easily solves his opening problems.

6...cxd4 7.cxd4 Nb6 8.Bd3 Bg4 9.Be3 e6



Position after: 9...e6

This looks like a good French or Advance Caro-Kann from the black perspective.

After ...Be7 followed by ...0-0 moves like ...Nb4, ...Nc4 and the maneuver ...Bh5-g6 are in the air.

7.Be2 f6

7...Be7!? Possibly intending to recapture on f6 with the bishop following ...f7-f6 exf6.

8.exf6



Position after: 8.exf6

Now 8...Qxf6 was played in Rozentalis, E – Zapolskis, A Vilnius 2002 and proved slightly better for White after 9.0-0 Bd6 10.Bg5! Qf7 11.Bh4.

Finkel offers the improvement 8...Nxf6 9.0-0 Bd6 in his annotations of that game for ChessBase, and I agree with him that Black could indeed have claimed equality there.

b) 2.Nc3 d5 3.e5 --

1.e4 Nf6 2.Nc3



Position after: 2.Nc3

2...d5

2...e5 is of course another story, where the move order has served Black to exclude the Ruy Lopez, the Italian and the Scotch. He thus has saved a considerable amount of work compared to what a usual 1.e4 e5 player must learn.

3.e5

3.exd5 Nxd5 is the other option to be investigated.



Position after: 3...Nxd5

A) 4.Bc4 Nb6 [If 4...Nxc3 White can profitably throw in 5.Qf3 before recapturing the knight.] 5.Bb3 Nc6 6.Nf3 Bf5 7.0-0 e6 [From this point on, going for the bishop by means of 7...Na5 deserved serious attention.] 8.d4 Be7



Position after: 8...Be7

9.d5 This leads to simplifications, but White had nothing better and was probably concerned about ...Na5. 9...exd5 10.Nxd5 Nxd5 11.Bxd5 0-0=

Taimanov, M – Tseshkovsky, V USSR Ch Moscow 1976.

B) 4.Qf3!?

B1) 4...Nb6 Basagic, Z (2370) – Baburin, A (2470) Hartberg 1991 is worthy of attention, when our cybernetic friend offers 5.d4!? Qxd4 and now the surprising 6.Qg3©.



Position after: 6.Qg3©

The c7-pawn is attacked while the black queen is denied the e5-square and 7.Nf3 can now follow. White has serious compensation.

B2) 4...c6 5.Bc4 e6 was rock-solid for Black in Papp, G (2471) – Heinzl, O (2402) Balatonlelle 2004.

B3) 4...e6 5.Bc4 Nb4 6.Bb3 N8c6 [6...c5!?] 7.Nge2



Position after: 7.Nge2

7...Be7?! [7...Na5 was right: 8.Ba4+ Bd7 9.a3 Nd5=] 8.a3 Ne5 9.Qg3 Nbc6 10.d4 This remained slightly better for White in Bellon Lopez, J (2350) – Alburt, L (2510) Bucharest 1978, but why not grab the pawn? [10.Qxg7!±]

C) 4.Nf3 The white formation being rather innocuous, Black can react in various ways. Some fresh examples, all at a rapid time control, follow.



Position after: 4.Nf3

C1) 4...Nc6 5.Bb5 Bg4 6.h3 Bh5 7.g4?! Bg6 8.Ne5 Qd6 9.Nc4? [9.d4∞] 9...Qe6+ was already much better for Black in Baklan, V (2587) – Ponomariov, R (2631) chess.com 2020.

C2) 4...Nxc3 5.bxc3 g6 6.g3 Bg7 7.Bg2 0-0 8.0-0 c5 with rough equality, Livaic, L (2507) – Bortnyk, O (2598) chess.com 2020.

C3) 4...Bg4 5.h3 Bh5 6.d4 e6 7.g4 Bg6 8.Bg2 Nb4?! [the robust 8...c6 was much sounder] 9.0-0 [9.Ne5! intending 9...Nxc2+ 10.Kf1 Nxa1 11.Bxb7±] 9...Bxc2 10.Qd2 Liang, A (2589) – Ashwin, J (2500) chess.com 2019. White's lead in development provides him ample compensation for the pawn.

C4) 4...g6 5.g3 A rare bird. 5.Bc4 is by far White's most frequent choice here and could transpose into 4.Bc4. 5...Bg7 6.Bg2 Nb6 [6...Nxc3 7.bxc3 would transpose into 4...Nxc3 5.bxc3 g6.] 7.0-0 Nc6



Position after: 7...Nc6

A more familiar position to us, with the white pawn on e2 rather than c2, would occur after ^(to the line)1.Nf3 Nf6 2.c4 g6 3.Nc3 d5 4.cxd5 Nxd5 5.g3 Bg7 6.Bg2 Nb6 7.0-0 Nc6. The theory of this branch of the Grunfeld is quite developed, whereas the actual position arose only in the two following duels: 8.a4 a5

C4.1) 9.d4 0-0 [sidestepping the sinful 9...Nxd4? 10.Nxd4 Bxd4 11.Nb5±] 10.Be3?! [10.Nb5! see 9.Nb5] 10...Bf5 was roughly equal in Radjabov, T (2734) – Ivanchuk, V (2704) Beijing (blitz) 2014.

C4.2) 9.Nb5 0-0 10.d4



Position after: 10.d4

This was seen in Harikrishna, P (2727) – Ivanchuk, V (2704) Beijing (blitz) 2014, where the Ukrainian failed to equalize. 10...Be6 11.Re1 Bd5 12.Bf4 Rc8 13.c3 Here 13.b3! followed by 14.c4 was more determined and would have set Black considerable problems. The same idea was available one move later, but it is unclear whether that was more promising than White's slow approach. 13...Qd7 14.b3 Rfd8 15.c4!? Or 15.Qc2 and White has a pleasant edge. 15...Bxf3 16.Qxf3 Nxd4 17.Nxd4



Position after: 17.Nxd4

And here 17...Bxd4 18.Rad1 with strong pressure or 17...Qxd4!? 18.Bxc7 and now Black can try to sacrifice his queen by means of 18...Rxc7 19.Rad1 Rcd7 20.Rxd4 Bxd4©.

Let's return to 3.e5.



Position after: 3.e5

3...d4

This and 3...Ne4 represent Black's alternatives to our choice of 3...Nfd7 (covered in the next subchapter). Here are some brief lines and notes to illustrate them.

3...Ne4 4.Nce2 White is now threatening 5.d2-d3 and if ...Nc5 then 6.d3-d4, gaining precious time to develop. I don't dig much into the next moves since, as I mentioned, we'd go for 3...Nfd7. [White could also try 4.Nxe4 dxe4 5.d4 and now 5...exd3 6.Bxd3 Nc6= looks sensible.] 4...f6 5.Nf3 [5.d3 Ng5∞] 5...fxe5 6.d3 [6.Nxe5!?] 6...Nd6 [6...Nf6!?] 7.Nxe5 Nd7



Position after: 7...Nd7

Smyslov, V (2595) – Alburt, L (2505) Leningrad 1977. The position is about equal.

4.Nce2

This can become entertaining, in contrast with the dull 4.exf6.

The capture 4.exf6 may lead directly to an equal endgame after 4...dxc3 5.fxg7 [alternatively 5.bxc3 exf6 is also about level] 5...cxd2+ 6.Qxd2

[6.Bxd2 Bxg7 is of course a quite decent option for White too. Practice has however shown he can't easily profit from his healthier pawn structure, and thus the position remains balanced.] 6...Qxd2+ 7.Bxd2 Bxg7 8.0-0-0



Position after: 8.0-0-0

White scored three wins and 33 draws without defeat from this position when both belligerents were rated over 2400. So if you are ready to run the risk of getting bored in order to “play it safe” as White... Here you have a rather recent GM clash: 8...Bf5 [8...Nc6 is more frequent, since Black may prefer hiding his king on the other wing. We will soon see why.] 9.Ne2 0-0?! [9...Nc6!] 10.Ng3 Be6 11.Nh5±



Position after: 11.Nh5±

11...Bxb2+ Otherwise 12.Nf4 followed by Nd5 or Bh6 could have been annoying, but the remedy is worse than the evil. 12.Kxb2 Bg4 13.Re1 Bxh5 14.g4 Bg6 15.h4 f6 16.h5 Bf7 17.g5 Rd8 18.Bd3 fxg5 19.Bxg5+– Because of Black's exposed king his opponent needed only 10 more moves to clinch victory in Plaskett, H (2445) – Vaganian, R (2577), World Team Ch 50+, Radebeul 2016.

After 4.Nce2 Black has three options.



Position after: 4.Nce2

4...Ng4!

A) 4...Nfd7?! led to some typical nonsense in the ultrablitz game Mamedyarov, S (2767) – So, W (2767) chess.com 2019: 5.e6! Nf6 6.exf7+ Kxf7 7.Nf3 Nc6 White naturally stood much better at this point but,

probably because of the fast time control, he lost the thread a few moves later.

B) Another sensible jump, namely 4...Ne4, is borderline if White correctly replies 5.c3!.



Position after: 5.c3!

5...Nc6 [5...dxc3? is bad on account of the simple 6.bxc3 but it hides a trap: 6.Qa4+ Nd7 and now 7.Qxe4? is erroneous due to Nc5, but after 7.Nxc3! White stands clearly on top and the biter is being bitten.]

B1) 6.cxd4 Ng5

B2) 6.Nxd4 Nxd4 7.Qa4+ c6 8.cxd4 Ng5 or 8.Qxd4 Qxd4 9.cxd4 Ng5



Position after: 9...Ng5

Intending ...Ne6. In all those lines Black can claim a certain amount of compensation even if he doesn't recover his pawn in the near future, but is it really enough?

5.f4 c5 6.Nf3 h5 7.b4 d3 8.Ng3 dxc2 9.Qxc2 cxb4 10.Bc4 e6 11.f5 exf5 12.d4f



Position after: 12.d4f

Ponkratov, P (2624) – Khismatullin, D (2679) Khanty-Mansiysk 2014.

What a change of picture compared to 3...d4 4.exf6 dxc3!.

Obviously the position after 6...h5 is quite rich and deviations for both sides are possible after every single move.

(back to the text) A more familiar position to us, with the white pawn on e2 rather than c2, would occur after 1.Nf3 Nf6 2.c4 g6 3.Nc3 d5 4.cxd5 Nxd5 5.g3 Bg7 6.Bg2 Nb6 7.0-0 Nc6.

c) 2.Nc3 d5 3.e5 Nfd7

1.e4 Nf6 2.Nc3 d5 3.e5 Nfd7



Position after: 3...Nfd7

I suggest establishing this retreat as our main move.

4.d4

A) 4.e6 This gambit appeared for the first time in Mieses, J – Colle, E, Frankfurt 1930 according to my database. It is dangerous in practice because it leads to sharp positions, but from a theoretical standpoint Black is at least fine. 4...fxe6 5.d4



Position after: 5.d4

A1) 5...c5 I personally prefer to attack the white center at once.



Position after: 5...c5

A1.1) 6.dxc5 is another attempt that was, however, skilfully neutralized by Black in the following encounter. 6...Nc6 7.Nf3 g6 8.Nd4



Position after: 8.Nd4

8...Ndb8! [Of course not 8...Nxc5?? 9.Nxc6 bxc6 10.Qd4+–.] 9.Nxc6 Nxc6 10.Bb5 Bg7 11.Qf3 In order to prevent ...0-0, but that doesn't

really bother Black. 11...Bd7 12.0-0 Nd4³ Garbisu de Goni, U (2483) – Del Rio de Angelis, S (2499) San Juan 2008.

A1.2) 6.Nf3 Nc6 7.Bb5 g6



Position after: 7...g6

Black is about to continue ...Bg7 followed by ...0-0, with the better game. Although White has scored decently from this position, computer-assisted analysis shows that he is struggling to maintain the balance. Here are some variations to illustrate that assertion. 8.Be3 [8.0-0 Bg7 9.Bxc6 bxc6 10.Ng5 Nf8 11.dxc5 h6 12.Nf3 e5 This looked quite promising for Black in Borda, A – Varga, Z, Lodi 2006; 8.h4 Bg7 9.Bxc6 bxc6 10.Ng5 Nf6 11.h5 gxh5 12.Bf4 0-0µ Petenyi, T (2443) – Ivanchuk, V (2733) European Cup Novi Sad 2016. White's attack on the kingside is illusory and he has been overwhelmed in the center.] 8...Bg7 9.dxc5 Qa5!? [Instead, Black can also opt for ...a6, or 9...0-0 10.0-0 Qc7, while 10...Qa5 transposes into Hector – Sergeev, see 9...Qa5, 11.Re1 Nde5 12.Nd4



Position after: 12.Nd4

12...Ng4!! – rather than 12...Bd7 Hector, J – Madsen, D, Copenhagen 1996 – 13.Qxg4 Nxd4 14.Bxd4 Rf4µ] 10.0-0 0-0 11.Rb1 a6 12.Bxc6 bxc6 13.Re1.



Position after: 13.Re1

In Hector, J – Sergeev, V, Berlin 1995, Black now opted for 13...Qc7, but he could also have tried 13...Rb8 in order to deny his opponent the answer Nxd5 when ...e6-e5 comes. 14.Bd4 Rxf3 15.Bxg7 Rf5³ With ...e6-e5 or ...Qc7 to follow, depending on what White does.

A2) 5...Nf6 looks playable too. 6.Nf3 g6 7.h4 From the white perspective this should come as a reflex, or at least be considered, as soon as ...g7-g6 appears on the board. 7...Bg7 8.Bd3 c5 [8...0-0!?!]



Position after: 8...c5

9.dxc5 [Or 9.h5 cxd4 and now both 10.h6 and 10.Nxd4 are pretty obscure.] 9...Nc6 10.h5 gxh5 [10...Nxh5 should be alright too, and following for instance 11.Rxh5 gxh5 12.Ng5 Bxc3+ 13.bxc3 Qa5∞ Black will hide his king on the queenside, hoping his extra material will tell one day.] 11.Bf4 Qa5 12.Qd2 Bd7



Position after: 12...Bd7

Sensible play from both sides so far in Nisipeanu, L (2515) – Horvath, C (2540) Balatonbereny 1996, but now a pair of inaccuracies was exchanged. Given the complexity of the position, this is naturally quite understandable. 13.0-0-0? [1 13.a3] 13...0-0? [13...d4!] 14.Kb1 Qxc5 15.Bg3 Ng4 16.Rxh5 Bxc3 17.Qxc3 Peace was signed at this point although the engine shows a certain preference for White.

B) 4.f4 c5! After this logical move, Nxd5?! here or on the next move would be answered by ...Nxe5. This swap of pawns would favor Black since White couldn't claim a space advantage anymore, and would merely be left with weaknesses on the kingside [unless you are happy to discuss a main line of the French Defense, I'd suggest refraining from 4...e6 5.Nf3 c5 6.d4, when the afore-mentioned transposition has indeed taken shape]. 5.Nf3 Nc6



Position after: 5...Nc6

Now 6.d4 is likely to transpose into 4.d4, which is equal. Other attempts by White lead to rather uncharted territories where the stronger player will probably better navigate his way. Some examples follow.

B1) The shy 6.d3 occurred in Hort, V (2590) – Herbrechtsmeier, C (2320) Germany 1982, which continued 6...Nb6 7.h3 h5 [Black could now have satisfied himself with a good version of the French and simply played 7...e6 followed by ...Be7 and a quick ...f7-f6.] 8.g3



Position after: 8.g3

8...Bd7?! [instead of this passive move 8...Bf5 9.Nh4 g6 would have justified his decision to play 7...h5: Black now intends ...e6 and ...Be7, forcing White's hand, and if 10.Nxf5 gxf5 the advance ...h5-h4 will be in the air.] 9.Bg2².

B2) 6.Bb5!? e6 [if Black has an aversion to doubled pawns he can try 6...Ndb8!? and if 7.d4 then 7...cxd4 followed by 8...a6] 7.Bxc6 bxc6 8.0-0 c4 Petenyi, T (2450) – Gazik, V (2501) Banska Stiavnica 2018.

B3) 6.g3

B3.1) 6...a6!? I suppose Black wants to play ...Nb6, and if White replies a2-a4, to both avoid ...a7-a5 and let him further advance a5-a6. At least this is my guess! 7.Bg2 Nb6 8.d3 Bg4[∞] Pavasovic, D (2440) – Bagirov, V (2530) Bern 1995.



Position after: 8...Bg4[∞]

Black is ready to part with his light-squared bishop, in return for a solid position where White can't easily make progress on the kingside.

B3.2) 6...e6 7.Bg2 Be7 8.0-0 0-0 9.Kh1



Position after: 9.Kh1

This was, among others, Popchev, M – Pavlovic, M Cacak 1991 and Schlindwein, R – Naumkin, I Cappelle-la-Grande 1994, where Black respectively chose 9...Rb8 and 9...f6. Both are roughly equal, but my preference would go to the first one since in the second case after 10.exf6 White has more clues as to how he should continue.

Let's return to 4.d4.



Position after: 4.d4

4...c5

A) 4...e6 Play has transposed into a French where the main line now runs 5.f4 c5 6.Nf3 Nc6 7.Be3 and so on.

B) 4...Nb6 is objectively inferior to its above alternatives, but nonetheless playable. Here's a recent illustration of it, where this actual position was reached via another move order. 5.Nf3 Bg4 [5...Bf5?! 6.Nh4! Bd7 7.Be3! e6 8.Nf3 and Black can't achieve the desired ...c7-c5 push.] 6.h3 Bxf3 7.Qxf3 e6 8.Qg3 Nc6 9.Be3



Position after: 9.Be3

9...Ne7 [9...Qd7 with ... 0-0-0 and the undermining ...f7-f6 to follow, was perhaps more appropriate. White should always pay attention to the jumps ...Nb4/...Nc4, so keeping his slight edge isn't so trivial.] 10.Bd3 With better prospects for White, Musyuk, L (2190) – Rozentalis, E (2540) Netanya 2019.

5.f4

A) 5.e6 fxe6 transposes into 4.e6.

B) 5.Nxd5? cxd4 is already better for Black, who threatens 6...Qa5+ and 6...Nxe5, while 6.Qxd4? runs into 6...Nb6, winning a piece after 7.c4 e6–+.

5...cxd4 6.Nb5 Nc6 7.Nf3 Ndb8!



Position after: 7...Ndb8!

Liberating the bishop and queen, and planning to replace the c6-knight if it takes on d4.

8.Nbxd4

8.Nfxd4 a6 9.Nc3 Nxd4 10.Qxd4 e6 11.Be3 Nc6 12.Qb6 Qxb6 13.Bxb6 g5= Relange, E (2260) – Hauchard, A (2420) France 1991.

8...Bg4 9.Be2 e6 10.Be3 Bxf3 11.Nxf3 Nd7 12.0-0 Bc5 13.Bxc5 Nxc5,,

With approximate equality.

Berg, E (2539) – Zelcic, R (2525) European Ch Kusadasi 2006.



Position after: 13...Nxc5

d) 2.e5 Ng8

1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Ng8



Position after: 2...Ng8

Funnily, this dubious retreat that nothing justifies, scores quite respectably in rapid games at GM level! It has given rise to, among other things, a blitz

debate between Giri and Mamedyarov, where all three games concluded peacefully.

3.d4 d6 4.Nf3

A) 4.exd6 seems less logical to me but probably keeps an edge anyway. After all, Black loses two tempi in the opening! 4...cxd6



Position after: 4...cxd6

A1) 5.c4 Nf6 6.Nc3 e6 [6...g6!?] 7.Nf3 Be7 8.Bd3 0-0 9.0-0 b6 10.Bg5 Nbd7 11.Rc1 Bb7 12.Re1 Re8 13.h3 Nf8



Position after: 13...Nf8

Huschenbeth, N (2585) – Admiraal, M (2478) chess.com 2019. This resembles a Torre Attack, ^(to the line)1.d4 Nf6 2.Nf3 e6 3.Bg5, where typically for that opening White enjoys a space advantage while his opponent can rely on a solid position.

A2) 5.Nf3 Nf6 6.c4 g6 7.Nc3 Bg7 8.Be2 0-0 9.0-0



Position after: 9.0-0

9...Re8 [9...Nc6?! 10.d5 was, for understandable reasons, not to Black's liking, although that would have given him the chance to retreat both his knights to their home bases in the same game! 10...Nb8²] 10.h3 a6 11.Be3 e6 12.Rc1 d5 13.c5 Nc6 14.a3 Ne4 Giri, A (2782) – Mamedyarov, S (2801) chess.com 2018. Black has succeeded in getting a playable game.

B) I guess 4.f4 should be slightly better for White following something like 4...Nh6 5.Nf3 g6,

Position after: 5...g6

but thanks to the undermining tools ...c7-c5 and ...f7-f6 Black won't be left without chances.

Let's see what happens after 4.Nf3.



Position after: 4.Nf3

4...dxe5

A) 4...Bg4?!

A1) 5.Be2 dxe5 6.Nxe5 Bxe2 7.Qxe2 Qxd4 8.Nd2© [Instead of 8.Qb5+? as in Eggelston, D – Fedoseev, V, Dubai 2016: 8...Nd7 9.Nxd7



Position after: 9.Nxd7

Now the unexpected 9...0-0-0!³ turned the tables.]

A2) 5.h3! Bh5 6.e6! I suppose this can be called the refutation of 4...Bg4 6...fxe6 7.g4 Bg6



Position after: 7...Bg6

Now the move mentioned by Shaw in *Play 1.e4!*, 8.Bc4!, aims at forcing ...d6-d5 [the bishop move is even stronger than 8.Ng5f Kotronias, V (2611) – Sandipan, C (2585) Gausdal 2008]. 8...Qd7 9.Qe2 White has more than enough compensation for a mere pawn.

B) 4...c6



Position after: 4...c6

B1) 5.h3 Bf5 This occurred in Fressinet, L (2717) – Carlsen, M (2881) Rapid World Ch Dubai 2014, where 6.g4 was now more testing than the French GM's cautious handling of the position: 6.Bd3 Bxd3 7.Qxd3 dxe5 8.Nxe5 Nd7 9.Bf4 Ngf6 10.Nc3 Nxe5 11.Bxe5 e6 12.0-0-0 Be7=.

B2) 5.exd6 Simple and good. 5...exd6 6.Bd3 Nf6 7.0-0 Be7 8.h3



Position after: 8.h3

8...Nbd7?! [Black will (or should) castle anyway, so that doing it immediately would have been more flexible: 8...0-0.] 9.c4 Nf8?! [9...0-0 was better but still no joy after 10.Nc3, when Black has nothing to compensate for his spatial discomfort.] 10.Re1 Ng6 11.Qe2± Oleksienko, M – Bernadskiy, V Lvov (rapid) 2017. Black can't castle because of Bxg6 followed by Qxe7, so he already experiences some serious trouble.

C) 4...Bf5 5.Nc3 [5.Bd3!?] 5...e6 6.Bd3 Bg6 [6...Bxd3 7.Qxd3 Nc6 was probably safer.] 7.0-0 [7.d5!? was tempting: White is better developed and could be fast with something like Bf4, Qe2 and 0-0-0.] 7...d5 8.Ne2 c5



Position after: 8...c5

Now instead of 9.c3 Caruana, F – Harikrishna, P, Saint Louis (blitz) 2019, it made sense to open lines while Black is still far behind in development, therefore 9.c4!.

D) I will refrain from commenting the following gem of Bricard's most creative period, but couldn't resist including it as a curiosity: 4...h6 5.Be2 g5 6.exd6 cxd6 7.0-0 Bg7 8.h3 e6 9.c4 f5 [9...Ne7!?] 10.Nc3 Nf6 11.d5 e5 12.c5 e4 13.Nd4 dxc5 14.Bb5+ Ke7 15.Nb3 a6 16.Be2 Qd6∞.



Position after: 16...Qd6∞

Reeh, O (2425) – Bricard, E (2350) Hameln 1987; needless to say, Black eventually prevailed...

5.Nxe5 Nd7



Position after: 5...Nd7

This way of playing renders the whole 2...Ng8 line acceptable and slightly contradicts my previous comment “retreat that nothing justifies”. In comparison with 2...Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.Nf3 dxe5 5.Nxe5, where after 5...Nd7 White has the known blow 6.Nxf7, sacrificing his knight is obviously pointless here. He thus needs to address the ...Nxe5 threat another way, and the choice for that purpose is broad.

6.Bd3

This simple approach, along with 6.Qf3 (intending Nc3, Bf4 and then possibly 0-0-0), should suffice to claim a small edge.

Since White has a space advantage, keeping pieces on with the more frequently played 6.Nf3 makes sense too. I, however, believe Black has more chances to level the game there. Some examples follow.



Position after: 6.Nf3

A) 6...g6 7.Bc4 e6 [7...Nh6 was perhaps a smarter way to parry the threat of Bxf7+ Kxf7 Ng5+, and then Ne6 trapping the black queen.] 8.0-0 Bg7 9.Re1 Ne7 10.Nc3 0-0 11.Bg5 h6 12.Bh4



Position after: 12.Bh4

12...c6? [Black should have gone for 12...g5 13.Bg3 Nf5∞.] 13.Ne4! g5 14.Nfxg5 hxg5 15.Bxg5+– Giri, A (2782) – Mamedyarov, S (2801) chess.com (blitz) 2018.

B) 6...Ngf6



Position after: 6...Ngf6

B1) 7.Bd3

B1.1) 7...b6 8.0-0 Bb7 9.Re1 e6 10.c4 Bd6 11.Nc3 0-0 12.Bg5 h6 13.Bh4 c5



Position after: 13...c5

14.dxc5 [14.d5!? could have been tried: 14...exd5 15.Nxd5 Bxd5 16.cxd5 a6 17.a4 and White may be a bit better here] 14...Nxc5 15.Bc2 Be7 This position was quite decent for Black in Demchenko, A (2679) – Abdusattorov, N (2546) World Blitz Ch St Petersburg 2018.

B1.2) 7...c5 is interesting as well, while 7...g6 saw Black equalize quickly in Sebag, M (2476) – Harika, D (2492) chess.com (blitz) 2019. 8.0-0 Bg7 9.Re1 0-0 10.c3 c6 11.Qe2 Re8 12.h3



Position after: 12.h3

12...Nd5 [12...e5= was already possible and equal, since after taking White wouldn't manage to hang on to his extra pawn.] 13.Qc2 e5 14.dxe5 Nxe5 15.Nxe5 Bxe5³

B2) 7.g3 e6 This position is akin to a French Rubinstein ^(to the line)(1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.Nd2/3.Nc3 dxe4 4.Nxe4) where White seems to have more options. [7...g6 8.Bg2 Bg7 9.0-0 0-0 10.Nbd2 c6 11.Nc4 Nb6 12.Nce5 Be6 Kulaots, K (2563) – Edouard, R (2659) Wroclaw (blitz) 2014.

White's quiet setup allowed his opponent to develop smoothly, and chances are reciprocal.]



Position after: 7...e6

8.Bg2 c5 [8...Bd6 – Black wasn't on time to break with ...e6-e5 – 9.Nbd2! e5?! 10.Nc4 with a sizeable plus to White.] 9.0-0 cxd4 10.Nxd4 Be7 11.a4 [11.Qe2, intending to continue 12.Rd1 and then perhaps c2-c4, Nc3 and so on, was likely stronger.] 11...0-0 12.a5 a6 13.Nd2 Qc7 Giri, A (2782) – Mamedyarov, S (2801) chess.com 2018.



Position after: 13...Qc7

White may stand a bit better here but there's nothing dramatic from Black's perspective.

6...Ngf6



Position after: 6...Ngf6

This happened in Grandelius, N (2547) – Fries Nielsen, J (2411) Lund 2011.

7.0-0!²

This natural move could have superseded 7.Nd2.

Going back a move, 6...g6 deserved attention, while after 6...c5 the developing move 7.Be3 looks good to me.

All in all, but this won't come as a surprise to anyone: Black can hardly hope for more than a slightly worse position out of the opening with

2...Ng8, provided White has a minimal knowledge of that line. No wonder GMs have tried it only in rapid games in the vast majority of cases.

(back to the text) This resembles a Torre Attack, 1.d4 Nf6 2.Nf3 e6 3.Bg5, where typically for that opening White enjoys a space advantage while his opponent can rely on a solid position.

(back to the text) This position is akin to a French Rubinstein (1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.Nd2/3.Nc3 dxe4 4.Nxe4)

Chapter 2

Alternatives on move 3

1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5

Chapter Guide

Chapter 2 – Alternatives on move 3

In Chapter 1 White had to do something to cover his e4-pawn after 1.e4 Nf6, while after 2.e5 Nd5 that little soldier isn't under fire anymore. This means the list of "reasonable" moves is a lot longer now, and I even found 3.Na3 in the book *125 Chess Opening Surprises* which I recently translated into French. I will skip this sort of maverick move since I believe chess common sense (developing pieces, fighting for the center) added to the guidance that a quick ...d7-d6 is a necessary component of Black's opening strategy, should be enough to reach a satisfactory game for Black. We will therefore look at:

1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5

a) 3.Qf3, 3.g3

b) 3.Bc4 Nb6 4.Bb3 --

c) 3.Bc4 Nb6 4.Bb3 d6

d) 3.c4 Nb6 4.a4

e) 3.c4 Nb6 4.c5 Nd5 5.Nc3 Nxc3

f) 3.c4 Nb6 4.c5 Nd5 5.Nc3 e6

g) 3.c4 Nb6 4.c5 Nd5 5.Nc3 c6

h) 3.Nc3 --

i) 3.Nc3 Nxc3 4.bxc3

j) 3.Nc3 Nxc3 4.dxc3

a) 3.Qf3, 3.g3

1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5



Position after: 2...Nd5

3.g3!?

This innocent move was a favorite of Lithuanian GM Eduardas Rozentalis, who apparently gave it up altogether around 2000. It seems White's aim is to drive his opponent out of the main Alekhine schemes rather than try very hard to get an opening edge.

White could try to surprise an unprepared opponent with 3.Qf3?! but this move goes against basic chess principles. 3...e6 4.Nc3



Position after: 4.Nc3

A) The simplest is 4...Nb4!, practically forcing the retreat 5.Qd1, after which 5...c5 or 5...d6 are at least equal for Black. If White insists on creative play and prefers 5.Qe4, then ...N8c6 threatens a combination of ...d7-d5 and ...f7-f5 which could eventually expel the white queen and lead to ...Nxc2+.

B) Black chose instead 4...Nxc3?! in the blitz game Williams, S – Pijpers, A Amsterdam 2019, and he was soon confronted with problems: 5.dxc3 Nc6 6.Qg3 [6.Bf4!?] 6...f6 [perhaps, and especially given the tactical abilities of the English GM, it would have been wiser to opt for the other typical undermining move 6...d6] 7.Nf3 fxe5 8.Bd3 Qf6 9.Ng5 g6 10.h4,.



Position after: 10.h4,

Of course you may not mind a sharp game, but if one compares the position after 6.Qg3 and the one after 5.Qd1 Black can certainly save some stressful moments!

3...d6 4.exd6

In the event of 4.c4 Nb6 5.exd6 White has succeeded in sidestepping the dull 4.exd6 exd6 5.Bg2 Nf6 line, but he may regret having shown his hand so early with c2-c4. At any rate 5...exd6, 5...Qxd6 and even the pawn sacrifice 5...e5!?, intending to profit subsequently from White's weak spots along the d-file, are all about equal.

After 4.exd6 Black can recapture on d6 in three different ways.



Position after: 4.exd6

4...exd6

This gives Black easy equality since the game is likely soon to resemble a French Exchange where the white fianchettoed bishop is anything but impressive.

A) 4...cxd6 is more interesting strategically since the pawn structure won't be rigid and defined so early, but it also gives White more hopes of getting a small plus. 5.Bg2

A1) 5...Nf6 6.d4 g6



Position after: 6...g6

7.c4 This move order, trying to dissuade Black from playing ...d6-d5, may be a tad more accurate than starting with 7.Ne2. [7.Ne2 Bg7 8.0-0 d5 9.h3 0-0 10.Nd2 Nc6 11.c3 e5 12.dxe5 Nxe5∞ Rozentalis, E (2585) – Horvath, C (2485) Debrecen 1992. The passive white knights compensate for the relative weakness of Black's isolated queen's pawn.]



Position after: 7.c4

A1.1) 7...d5!? (anyway! – see note to 7.c4) would have led to another type of position following 8.cxd5 Nxd5 9.Nc3 Nxc3 10.bxc3. White

stands perhaps a tad better here, but it isn't too dramatic.



Position after: 10.bxc3

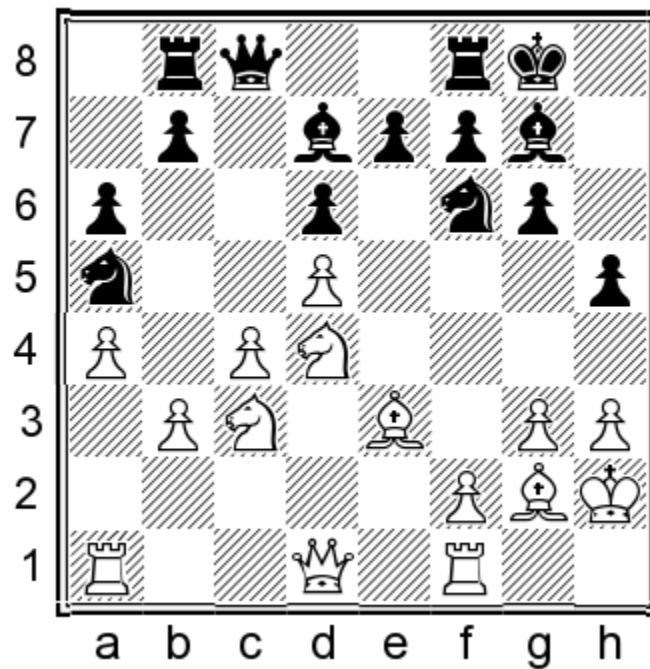
After 10...Bg7 and 11...0-0 Black can contemplate ...Nc6-a5, for instance.

A1.2) 7...Bg7 8.Nc3 0-0 9.Nge2 Nc6 10.0-0



Position after: 10.0-0

The game has taken a very atypical direction as it now clearly fits into an English Opening. The current position has proven slightly better for White in a few of Rozentalis's games: 10...Bf5!? [10...a6 11.b3 Rb8 12.h3 Bd7 13.d5² Rozentalis, E (2595) – Hjartarson, J (2585) Tilburg (rapid) 1994; 10...Bg4 11.Be3 Qd7 12.f3 Bh3 13.d5 Ne5 14.b3² Rozentalis, E (2600) – Yermolinsky, A (2605) Rakvere 1993 is similar to what Rozentalis got in the two games featuring ...a6. White could count on a stable plus thanks to his space advantage.] 11.h3 a6 12.b3 Rb8 13.Be3 h5 14.d5 Black is pushed back while White increases his spatial dominance. 14...Na5 15.Nd4 Bd7 16.a4 Qc8 17.Kh2



Position after: 17.Kh2

Rozentalis, E (2605) – Pribyl, J (2405) Liechtenstein 1996. All of Black's active possibilities are under control and White can slowly improve his position.

A2) Even though knights are often supposed to be awkwardly placed on b6 or g6, the retreat 5...Nb6!? is quite decent too. Both sides have a lot of possible setups here, and instead of 6.d4 as in Rozentalis, E (2595) – Yermolinsky, A (2590) North Bay 1994, White could also have probed his opponent with 6.a4, when both 6...a5 and 6...d5 are OK. 6...g6 7.Nf3 [7.Ne2!?] 7...Bg7 8.0-0 0-0 9.Na3 Bg4 [Another way to handle the position consisted in 9...Nc6 and if 10.d5 then 10...Nb4 and possibly 11...e6. After 10.c3 the logical and good reply is 10...e5,,] 10.c3 Nc6 11.h3 Bxf3 12.Qxf3 d5



Position after: 12...d5

Black had a rock-solid position in return for the pair of bishops. Next on his agenda is to reroute his b6-knight to d6 and then prepare a minority attack.

B) 4...Qxd6!? A rare recapture in the Alekhine, drifting the game towards a sort of Scandinavian (1.e4 d5 2.exd5 Qxd5). It is justified here by the fact that g2-g3 isn't too wild, and it should be suitable for more tactical games than its alternatives. 5.Bg2 Nc6 6.Nc3



Position after: 6.Nc3

B1) 6...Nf6 7.Nge2 e5 8.0-0 Bg4 [Our cybernetic friend prefers 8...Be6!, which, in comparison, allows Black to push ...h7-h5 later on.] 9.h3 Bh5 10.d3 0-0-0 11.Be3²



Position after: 11.Be3²

David, A (2465) – Fernandez Garcia, J (2445) Linares 1995. White can follow up with g3-g4 and then f2-f4. Since his monarch is surrounded by so many white pieces, weakening the kingside is quite bearable here.

B2) 6...Nxc3!? 7.bxc3 e5 8.d3 Be7 9.Ne2 [Starting with 9.Rb1 would have prevented what follows, but Black is by no means forced to castle long 9...0-0 10.Ne2 Rb8[∞] or 10...b6.] 9...Be6 10.c4 Qd7 11.Rb1 0-0-0 12.0-0 Bh3



Position after: 12...Bh3

This occurred in Petrosian, T (2606) – Nakamura, H (2670) Gibraltar 2008. Now the engine gives 13.Nc3 h5 14.Qf3 h4 15.Be3 as about equal but my preference rather goes to Black.

5.Bg2 Nf6 6.d4

6.Ne2 should not change much eventually: 6...d5 7.0-0 Bd6 8.d4 0-0= Plat,
V – Demidov, M chess.com (rapid) 2020.



Position after: 6.d4

6...d5

6...Be7 7.c4 d5?!

A) This worked well in Rozentalis, E (2650) – Miles, A (2550) New York
1997, which continued 8.c5?! 0-0 9.Ne2 b6 10.cxb6 axb6³.



Position after: 10...axb6³

Black had the sounder pawn structure and his opponent was left without
any obvious plan.

B) 8.cxd5! was much more to the point: 8...Nxd5 9.Nc3 Be6 10.Nge2 0-0
[10...Nc6!? is perhaps the way to go. 11.0-0 0-0 Now 12.Re1 is balanced
whereas 12.Nf4?! Nxf4 13.Bxf4 Nxd4 turns in Black's favor.] 11.0-0 c6
12.Nf4 Nxf4 13.Bxf4 Bf6



Position after: 13...Bf6

I disagree here with Finkel, who labelled this as equal in his notes to that
above-mentioned game for ChessBase. After 14.d5! cxd5 15.Nxd5² White
enjoys risk-free pressure.

7.Nf3 Be7 8.0-0 0-0 9.Ne5 Nbd7 10.Nc3 c6 11.f4

11.Bf4!?

11...Nxe5 12.fxe5

Curiously, the Lithuanian GM deviated four years later with the inferior 12.dxe5?! Ng4 13.Kh1 f6³ Rozentalis, E (2645) – Adams, M (2680) Germany 1998.

12...Ne8



Position after: 12...Ne8

13.Be3

13.Qh5 Kornev credits this move with a “?!” sign and affirms that after 13...f6!., White has misplaced his queen and is struggling to equalize; he may well be right! [13...f5? is strategically erroneous, and after 14.Ne2 Nc7 15.c3 Ne6 16.h4± Black was completely lacking counterplay in Rozentalis, E (2610) – Appel, R (2430) Germany 1994.]

13...f6

With approximate equality.

Or 13...g6!?!? followed by ...Ng7.

Conclusion: After 3.g3 d6 4.exd6 all three recaptures are sensible. 4...Qxd6 can lead to sharp play should Black then decide on ...0-0-0, 4...exd6 is a safe albeit somewhat dry path to equality and 4...cxd6 is perhaps the richest option but Black must then be careful not to land in a worse version of the English Opening.

b) 3.Bc4 Nb6 4.Bb3 --

1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5



Position after: 2...Nd5

3.Bc4

The main merit of this move is, in my view, to avoid some theory rather than hope for an opening edge.

3...Nb6

3...c6 4.d4 d6 5.Nf3 dxe5 6.Nxe5 g6 Tiviakov, S (2575) – Vaganian, R (2615) Moscow (blitz) 1993; the game has transposed into 1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.Nf3 dxe5 5.Nxe5 and so on.

4.Bb3



Position after: 4.Bb3

4...c5

A) 4...d6 5.d4 – see next subchapter.

B) 4...d5 Is probably good enough to achieve a roughly equal and sound position, where Black will manage to develop his light-squared bishop outside the pawn chain before he plays ...e7-e6. 5.d4 Bf5



Position after: 5...Bf5

B1) 6.g4?! Bg6 [6...Be4 7.f3 Bg6 could be a refinement, as in some lines of the Caro-Kann] 7.e6!? This thematic idea doesn't work nearly as well here as in ^(to the line)1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Ng8 3.d4 d6 4.Nf3 Bg4 5.h3 Bh5 6.e6, for instance. The reason is that White is missing a couple of tempi to extinguish his opponent's counterplay. 7...fxe6 8.Nf3 Nc6 9.Bf4



Position after: 9.Bf4

9...e5 [Black could have considered inserting 9...h5 or 9...a5!?.] 10.Nxe5 Nxe5 11.Bxe5 e6∞ Petrosian, T (2623) – Anastasian, A (2559) Yerevan 2009.

B2) 6.Ne2 e6



Position after: 6...e6

In my opinion Black just has an improved version of the Advance Caro-Kann: he will play ...c7-c5 in one move and White's light-squared bishop feels strange on b3.

B2.1) 7.Ng3 Bg6 8.h4 h6 9.h5 Bh7 10.c3 c5 11.0-0 Nc6 12.Qg4



Position after: 12.Qg4

Over the last few moves White has seized space on the kingside and he now prevents the development of the enemy dark-squared bishop.

12...c4?! [Closing the queenside is strategically dubious since Black loses his pressure on d4 and a source of counterplay, but 12...Nd7 was better and fine for Black.] 13.Bd1² Zorman, V (2360) – Bagirov, V (2530) Berlin 1995.

B2.2) 7.Nf4 c5 8.c3 Nc6 9.Be3 Rc8 10.g4 Be4



Position after: 10...Be4

Now rather than 11.f3 Bg6, as played in Maier, C (2350) – Vaganian, R (2645) Germany 1994, White should have gone for 11.0-0 with an unclear position.

5.d3



Position after: 5.d3

5...Nc6

5...d5 6.exd6 e6!? Not bad. [But 6...Qxd6 and 6...exd6 were naturally easier. The former could have transposed to 5...Nc6, while I suppose Mamedyarov rejected the latter as being “not complicated enough”.] 7.Qg4 The principled reply, trying to underline the drawback of Black’s last move [if 7.Nc3 Bxd6 then 8.Qg4 wouldn’t bother Black anymore: 8...0-0 9.Bh6 Qf6 10.Ne4 Qxh6 11.Nxd6 Nc6=]. 7...h5!? [7...Nc6!?] 8.Qe2 Nc6 9.Nf3 Bxd6 10.Nc3²



Position after: 10.Nc3²

Dzhumaev, M (2512) – Mamedyarov, S (2657) Dubai 2004. White has developed sensibly and achieved a healthy position, whereas his opponent has to figure out what to do with his h5-pawn.

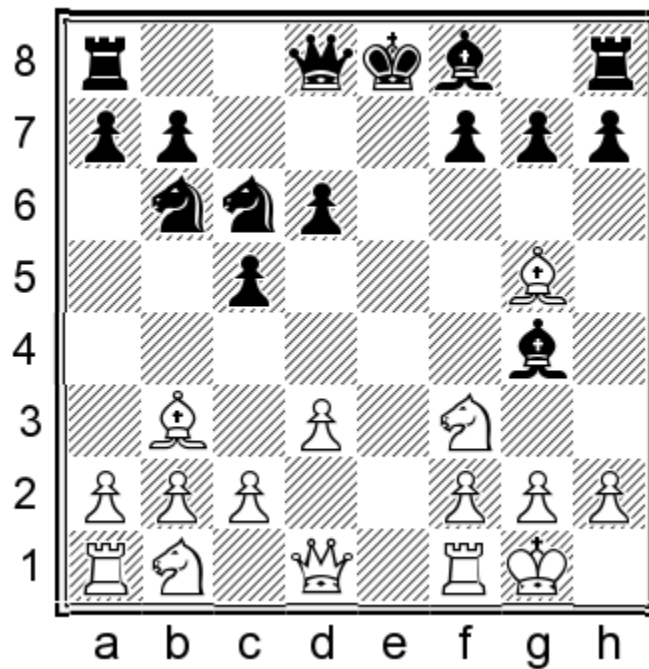
6.Nf3 d5 7.exd6 Qxd6



Position after: 7...Qxd6

The position that has arisen is similar to the following line of the Alapin Sicilian: 1.e4 1...c5 2.c3 Nf6 3.e5 Nd5 4.d4 cxd4 5.Nf3 Nc6 6.Bc4 Nb6 7.Bb3 d5 8.exd6 Qxd6. White will most likely not end up with an isolated d-pawn in our case, but on the other hand he is by far less dynamic.

The following unforced short draw has already received a professional “seal of approval”: 7...exd6 8.0-0 Bg4 9.Bg5



Position after: 9.Bg5

9...Bxf3 10.Bxf7+ Kd7 11.Be6+ Ke8 12.Bf7+ Kd7 13.Be6+ Ke8 $\frac{1}{2}$ - $\frac{1}{2}$
 Shengelia, D (2582) – Kindermann, S (2530) Vienna 2010. [Now
 13...Kxe6?? would run into 14.Qe1+ and 15.Bxd8, winning material.]

8.Nc3 Bf5

Obviously not 8...Bg4? 9.Bxf7+ Kxf7 10.Ng5++-.

9.0-0 e6



Position after: 9...e6

10.a4

White could hunt the bishop but after 10.Nh4 Bg6 and 11...Be7 Black is quite OK too. The bishop on b3 isn't too great and Black has good control

of the center.

10...Be7 11.a5 Nd5 12.a6 b6 13.Nb5 Qd8 14.d4 0-0=



Position after: 14...0-0=

This was played in the game Sokolov, A (2583) – Ekstroem, R (2490) Switzerland 2011.

The far-advanced a6-pawn may disturb Black at a later stage, but so far he seems alright to me.

c) 3.Bc4 Nb6 4.Bb3 d6

1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.Bc4 Nb6 4.Bb3 d6



Position after: 4...d6

5.d4

A) 5.exd6?! plays into Black's hands, especially since both recaptures are good. 5...exd6 [5...cxd6 – see 5.Nf3.] 6.d4 d5 Boehnisch, M (2372) – Liebert, H (2265) Dresden 2006 was a French Exchange where the bishop at b3 should be sillier than the black knight at b6.

B) 5.f4?! looks more weakening than anything else. As often in this early Bc4 line Black can probe his opponent's intentions with 5...a5 and then go for something like ...dxe5, ...Nc6, ...Bf5 and ...e7-e6.

C) 5.Nf3 Nc6 6.exd6 cxd6 7.d4 g6 8.h3 Bg7 9.0-0 0-0 10.c3



Position after: 10.c3

10...Bf5 was approximately equal in Mischuk, D (2349) – Voitovich, V (2352) Lutsk (blitz) 2016 [10...e5 and now 11.Bg5 Qc7 12.Na3 a6 gives Black a fine game as well].

5...dxe5

5...Bf5 looks a bit adventurous but is playable too. 6.Qf3 Qc8



Position after: 6...Qc8

7.Bxf7+?! This will eventually favor Black. White had to content himself with a natural developing move instead of trying to refute his opponent's somewhat suspicious play. 7...Kxf7 8.g4 Nc6 [Or 8...dxe5 9.dxe5 Nc6 which led to approximate equality.] This occurred in Grabliauskas, V (2436) – Logdahl, H (2233) Dos Hermanas (internet blitz) 2004, where rather than the game continuation, 9.Ne2?!, White should have preferred 9.gxf5 Nxd4 10.e6+.

6.Qh5

This is White's idea and his only valuable move here, certainly much better than the recapture.

6.dxe5? Qxd1+ 7.Kxd1 would leave White with an uncastled king and a vulnerable e-pawn, i.e. a clear disadvantage.

6...e6 7.dxe5 a5!



Position after: 7...a5!

Black cleverly uses the position of the rival bishop to seize space on the queenside. Another important side-effect is that a future trade of his queen's

knight for that very same light-squared bishop would force White to recapture cxb3, weakening the d3-square.

8.a4

8.a3 happens more rarely and is likely a bit worse. Following 8...a4 9.Ba2 Nc6 10.Nf3



Position after: 10.Nf3

Black can generate some action in two slightly different fashions, both including the key-move ...Ra8-a5.

A) 10...Nd4 11.Nxd4 Qxd4 12.Qe2 [After 12.Nd2 Black could again activate his idle rook effectively with 12...Ra5! 13.Nf3 Qe4+ 14.Be3 Bc5,,] 12...Ra5 13.f4 Nd5 14.c3 Qb6



Position after: 14...Qb6

This was Maier, C – Schulze, U Germany 1992. I could stop here but the following half a dozen moves were also instructive: 15.c4 Ne7 16.Bd2 Ng6 17.Bxa5 Qxa5+ 18.Qd2 Qxd2+ 19.Kxd2 Nxf4 20.g3 Ng6 21.Re1 Bc5©.



Position after: 21...Bc5©

Objectively the game is still balanced but I like Black's chances with the weak pawn on e5 and the silly bishop on a2.

B) 10...Ra5 11.Bd2 Rb5 [11...g6!? would have pushed the queen back to the inferior square h3: 12.Qh3 Rb5.] 12.0-0 Rxb2 13.Nc3 g6 14.Qg4



Position after: 14.Qg4

So far we have followed Sax, G – Liljedahl, L Teeside 1974, where instead of 14...h6, which left White on top after 15.Rfd1, Black should have preferred the materialistic 14...Nxe5 15.Nxe5 Qxd2. This looks a bit scary but the engine is happy for Black after 16.Ne4 Qd8 17.Qf4 [17.Ng5 hits on the same 17...f5] 17...f5 18.Ng5 Qf6



Position after: 18...Qf6

as he has enough defensive resources, the main one being perhaps ...Bd6. After 8.a4 Black can choose where to develop his b8-knight.



Position after: 8.a4

8...Na6

The main move here, planning to bounce back to c5 and chop off the enemy bishop.

8...Nc6 has been tested as well: 9.Nf3 g6 [9...Nd4 could be an improvement] 10.Qg4 Nd7 11.Bg5 [11.Qg3! would have yielded White a small plus] 11...Be7= Nagy, E – Vasiukov, E Budapest 1970.

9.Nf3

This position was reached the first time in Popov, N – Zaitsev, A Russia 1971.

White could also have tried developing the other knight.

9.Nc3 Nc5 10.Bg5 Be7 11.Rd1 Bd7



Position after: 11...Bd7

At first sight having forced the pin on the light-squared bishop looks like a small success, but White can't gain any profit from that. The game remains balanced.

9...Nc5 10.0-0

Something like 10.Bg5 Be7 11.Nc3 was again available.

10...Nxb3 11.cxb3 Qd3! 12.Nc3 Bd7∞

Stopping any Nc3-b5 jump. The black queen can come back to the defense of the kingside, by means of ...Qg6, and the long-term trumps are Black's: the two bishops and a healthier pawn structure. White must act dynamically here in order to keep the balance.



Position after: 12...Bd7∞

d) 3.c4 Nb6 4.a4

1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.c4 Nb6 4.a4



Position after: 4.a4

This surprising push could unsettle an inexperienced player, but while it isn't as weird as it looks, the weaknesses White creates in his own camp shouldn't be underestimated either. Black can basically react with either 4...a5 or 4...d6 (4...d5 comes to the same thing), both being adequate but leading to quite different types of games.

4...a5

4...d6 5.a5 N6d7



Position after: 5...N6d7

A) The customary pawn-sacrifice 6.e6, seen in an analogous form in Chapter 1 (after 1.e4 Nf6 2.Nc3 d5 3.e5 Nfd7 4.e6), should again be treated carefully. On the other hand, it is not dangerous from a theoretical standpoint, meaning that Black can already play for more than equality. (6.e6) 6...fxe6 7.d4



Position after: 7.d4

I believe White can hardly do without opening up his dark-squared bishop's diagonal and controlling the important e5-square. Black now has a wide choice of options, among them 7...Nc6 and 7...Nf6, but given the rarity of this line I will just mention 7...e5.

A1) White can address his opponent's intention of ...exd4 with 8.d5, depriving the queen's knight of the c6-square at the same time. Then 8...e6 9.Nc3 Be7 may be good enough, but Black can play in the same vein as against 8.Bd3: 8...Na6 9.Nc3 g6.



Position after: 9...g6

Here or on the next move White can adopt a slower approach with Nge2, where he has a certain degree of compensation for the invested pawn, but not quite enough in my opinion. 10.h4 Ndc5 11.h5 Bg7³ Black has so many plausible follow-ups (...e6, ...c6, ...Bf5) including both castles that he must be fine!

A2) 8.Bd3



Position after: 8.Bd3

8...g6! [Alternatively the less ambitious 8...Nf6 looks quite OK to me too. 9.dxe5 dxe5 10.Nc3 Nc6∞ Black's extra pawn isn't worth much (but it exists) while, if you recall the note after 4.a4, White has weakened a bunch of squares on the queenside.] 9.d5 White can't really ignore what's happening in the center. [9.h4?! exd4 10.h5 Nc5 11.hxg6 Qd7! Vacating the d8-square for the king if needed, but above all with ideas like ...Qe6+, ...Qg4 or ...Nxd3+ followed by ...Qf5. 12.Rxh7 Rg8μ This may look scary at first sight, but the engine is affirmative in its assessment.] 9...Nc5 10.Bc2 Instead, 10.Ne2 would also be answered by ...Nba6. 10...Nba6³



Position after: 10...Nba6³

Black just develops and keeps his extra pawn which could be useful, for instance after the following sequence: 11.Bd2 Bg7 12.b4?! e4! followed by ...Nd3+ and so on.

B) 6.exd6



Position after: 6.exd6

B1) 6...c5!? 7.Nc3 Ne5© [7...exd6!?!]

B2) 6...cxd6 If Black dislikes what follows, then 6...exd6 7.d4 is available. as well as the interesting pawn sacrifice above (B1). 7.d4 g6 [Worse is 7...e5?! 8.Nf3 Be7 9.Nc3² when White can just develop naturally and enjoy a space advantage.] 8.Nf3 Bg7 9.Be2 [The original 9.Ra3 failed to convince: 9...0-0 10.Be2 e5 11.dxe5= Firman, N (2466) – Bernadskiy, V (2511) Golden Sands 2015, or 11.Nc3 Nc6 12.d5 Nb4∞.] 9...0-0 10.0-0 Nc6



Position after: 10...Nc6

At this juncture White can't step back but must gambit his a-pawn.
11.d5! [The faulty 11.Bd2? Nxd4 12.Nxd4 Bxd4³ left White with very little to show for his pawn in Kislinsky, A (2488) – Kovalenko, I (2466) Yuzhny 2010.] 11...Nxa5 12.Bd2 b6 13.Bc3



Position after: 13.Bc3

This is quite a likely scenario when White goes for a2-a4-a5: he runs the clear risk of losing his a-pawn, albeit for enduring positional pressure. If Black doesn't wish to defend a somewhat cramped position, then he could try his luck with 6...exd6 or 6...c5. 13...Nf6 [or 13...Ne5 14.Nd4 Bd7 15.b3 Firman, N (2511) – Neverov, V (2564) Ordzhonikidze 2001] 14.b4 Nb7 15.Nd4 a5[∞]

Let's go back to 4...a5.



Position after: 4...a5

5.c5

A) 5.Ra3 d6 6.exd6 exd6 [6...cxd6!?] 7.Rg3 Bf5 8.Nc3 Nc6 9.d4?! [9.Nf3[∞] was better] 9...Nb4 Thanks to White's brilliant rook maneuver there is no fork on c2... That being said, the horse has taken possession of a nice outpost on b4. 10.Be2



Position after: 10.Be2

So far so good in Hauge, L – Agdestein, S Stavanger 2017, but now Black erred with 10...d5 11.c5². He should instead have gone for either 10...g6 or 10...Be7. 11.Rxg7 Not forced, but consistent with White's previous play. 11...Bg6 12.Nf3 Bf6 13.Rxg6 hxg6³. With the two bishops and one pawn

for the exchange, White has some compensation but this isn't fully enough.

B) If White now comes back to something more standard, by means of 5.d4, the obvious drawback of a2-a4 could be underlined later on by the sequence of moves ...Nb8-c6 d4-d5 ...Nc6-b4; most of the time Black's knight will then be safely anchored and well placed at b4. 5...d6



Position after: 5...d6

6.exd6 [6.f4?!/? playing the Four Pawns Variation isn't really an option for White with the inclusion of a2-a4 and ...a7-a5, since all the lines where he has to castle long would be compromised.] 6...cxd6!? 7.Nc3 g6 [7...Nc6 sidesteps the extra possibility of 8.c5 dxc5 9.Bb5+, which is however unclear after 9...N6d7.] 8.Be3 Bg7 9.Nf3



Position after: 9.Nf3

This occurred in the blitz game Smeets, J (2596) – De Jager, J (2437) Amstelveen 2019, when now 9...Nc6 or 9...0-0 would have been quite balanced.

5...Nd5 6.Nc3 Nb4 7.Bc4 d5 8.cxd6 exd6!

8...cxd6 is certainly playable as well, but Black already wants to fight for an advantage. He therefore doesn't make the concession of permanently weakening the b5-square.

9.Qb3



Position after: 9.Qb3

9...Be6!

This cute antidote to White's direct attack is mentioned by Alexei Kornev in *Play the Alekhine Defence* (published in 2019). It is certainly less complicated than 9...Qg5 or 9...Bf5, both fun to analyze by the way, or 9...Qe7 which occurred in Lu, S (2514) – Bu, X (2668) Xinghua 2012.

That wild game continued 9...Qe7 10.Nf3 Bg4 [10...N8c6!?] 11.0-0 Bxf3 12.exd6 cxd6 13.gxf3 N8c6



Position after: 13...N8c6

14.d4! Nxd4 15.Qd1 [15.Bb5+!?] with a mess on the board.

By choosing 9...Be6! Black wants to trade queens and remind his opponent of his numerous weaknesses.

10.Bxe6 fxe6



Position after: 10...fxe6

11.Nf3!

Keeping the queens represents White's best option.

11.Qxe6+? Be7 12.exd6 Qxd6 13.Qxd6 Bxd6 White now needs to parry the threat of ...Nc2+ and will soon lose his right to castle. Black has by far more than enough compensation for a meagre pawn here.

11...Nd3+

Tempting, but 11...d5 or 11...N8c6 may be stronger. At any rate Black's position should be a tad better in all cases.

12.Ke2 Nc5 13.Qb5+ c6 14.Qc4 d5 15.Qg4 Qd7∞



Position after: 15...Qd7

My recommendation won't differ from what previous books suggested: keep it simple and answer 4.a4 with 4...a5!.

e) 3.c4 Nb6 4.c5 Nd5 5.Nc3 Nxc3

1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.c4 Nb6 4.c5 Nd5 5.Nc3



Position after: 5.Nc3

There are certainly several ways to “interpret” the current position and White's last two moves. On the one hand he has seized space, on the other hand pushing the c-pawn to c5 has weakened a bunch of squares.

At any rate, now that d5 has become a nice outpost for the black horse, it makes plenty of sense to challenge it while developing a piece.

5...Nxc3!?

This is not regarded as Black's most clinical road to equality, but it isn't bad either and I shall briefly talk about it.

6.dxc3



Position after: 6.dxc3

Opening the dark-squared bishop's diagonal and speeding up development prevail over “taking towards the center”. Moreover, 6.bxc3 would leave the a-pawn isolated.

6...Nc6!

A) The imprecise 6...e6?! allows 7.Qg4! when Black is already experiencing some substantial trouble. 7...Nc6 8.Nf3



Position after: 8.Nf3

8...f5 [8...h5 9.Qg3 h4 10.Qg4 wouldn't have solved Black's problems by any means.] 9.exf6 Qxf6 10.Bd3± Ris, R (2415) – Adly, A (2593) Enschede 2008; c5 is taboo due to Qh5+. White just develops swiftly and clearly stands on top.

B) 6...d6?! 7.cxd6 exd6 8.Bf4²



Position after: 8.Bf4²

Sveshnikov, E (2524) – Collins, S (2409) Turin 2006. White is simply threatening to inflict upon his opponent an isolated pawn on d6. His initiative wouldn't evaporate in the ending, for example: 8...dxe5 9.Qxd8+ Kxd8 10.0-0-0+ Bd7 11.Bxe5 Nc6 12.Nf3f.

7.Nf3

In the event of 7.Bf4!? e6 8.Qg4 Black can go 8...Qe7!? at once (hoping for 9.b4?! a5!) or he can insert 8...h5 9.Qg3 h4 first. 10.Qg4 Qe7., The machine, however, suggests that White gets reasonable compensation if he sacrifices his c5-pawn.

7...e6



Position after: 7...e6

Now that Qg4 isn't an option anymore.

8.b4

8.Be3 b6

A) White can again play 9.b4, hoping that keeping a pawn on c5 will dissuade his opponent from pushing ...d7-d6. In that case 9...Bb7 followed by 10...Ne7 looks smart for Black. Otherwise, releasing the tension with 9.cxb6 makes sense. 9...axb6 10.a3



Position after: 10.a3

10...d6,, [GM Bagirov, an Alekhine expert, used 10...f5!? in Fogarasi, T – Bagirov, V Budapest 1989. He was rewarded with an unclear position which he later transformed into victory following 11.exf6 Qxf6 12.Bg5 Qf7 13.Bd3 Ba6 14.c4 Bd6∞.]

B) 9.Bb5 Bb7 10.cxb6 axb6 11.0-0 Be7 12.Qd3!? 0-0 [12...Na7!?] 13.Rfd1 d5 14.exd6



Position after: 14.exd6

14...cxd6 [14...Bxd6? is bad, as pointed out by Finkel, due to 15.Ng5 g6 16.Qe4! with Qh4 to follow and a dangerous attack on the kingside.] 15.Qe4! Qc7 [15...d5!?] 16.Qg4 Now, rather than the game continuation of 16...Rad8, all the following moves give a position with mutual chances in my opinion: 16...Bf6 Thorhallsson, T (2510) – Gausel, E (2540) Reykjavik 1997 [16...Rfd8!?!; 16...Na5!?!].

8...b6 9.cxb6 axb6



Position after: 9...axb6

10.b5?!

10.Bd3 was less compromising. Then 10...Bb7 11.0-0 Ne7 is unclear and needs further tests.

10...Nb8 ∞

Sveshnikov, E (2527) – Caspi, I (2450) Tel Aviv 2011. Black had in mind ...d7-d6 followed by ...Nd7, which was good enough to yield him his share of chances. However according to the engine 10...Ne7! was stronger and promising.

f) 3.c4 Nb6 4.c5 Nd5 5.Nc3 e6

1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.c4 Nb6 4.c5 Nd5 5.Nc3 e6



Position after: 5...e6

Black's most frequent choice. Since he will most likely castle short, opening up his dark-squared bishop's diagonal while hitting c5 at the same time is pretty logical for Black.

6.d4

Or 6.Nxd5 exd5 7.d4 d6 8.cxd6 cxd6 9.Nf3 Nc6 10.Be2 Be7=



Position after: 10...Be7=

Luther, T – Bauer, C Austrian Team Ch 2015. Quite a solid position for both sides, which could get more lively if White never takes exd6 but instead allows ...dxe5 dxe5.

Whether Black's passed d-pawn would prove to be strong or weak would then depend on the circumstances, I guess.

6...Nxc3 7.bxc3 b6



Position after: 7...b6

8.cxb6

A) 8.Qf3 can't trouble Black seriously, even if White is often happy to send his queen to the kingside. 8...Nc6 9.cxb6 [Or 9.Qg3 bxc5 10.dxc5 and now the typical maneuver 10...Ne7[∞] is even more justified by the fact that Black must cover his g7-pawn before developing his dark-squared bishop.] 9...axb6 10.Nh3 Bb7 11.Qg3 Qc8 [11...Ne7!?!; 11...Ra5!?!] 12.Nf4 Ba6 13.Nh5 Qb7



Position after: 13...Qb7

14.a4? [14.Nxg7+ Bxg7 15.Qxg7 0-0-0 meant nice compensation for Black and long-term concerns for the white king.] 14...Bxf1 15.Rxf1 Na5^μ Pourramezanali, A (2330) – Nguyen, N (2635) Mashhad 2011. Black has a very sound game strategically, as well as the potentially annoying ...Nb3 and ...Qe4+ shots.

B) 8.Qg4 bxc5! [The most logical, though 8...Ba6 9.Bxa6 Nxa6 could be acceptable too]. 9.Bg5 Be7TM [Black can't keep his extra pawn since 9...f6?? loses to 10.exf6 gxf6 11.Qh5+ Ke7 12.Bxf6+ Kxf6 13.Qh4++-]. 10.Bxe7 Qxe7 11.Qxg7 Rf8



Position after: 11...Rf8

GM Evgeny Sveshnikov has had this position as White four times according to my database, the first appearance being in his encounter vs Basagic in 1997. I am not sure if he disputes the computer's evaluation of roughly equal, or just believes the position is rich enough to give mutual chances (which reflects my personal opinion). At any rate, if you enter this line as Black I'd suggest that you carry on the analysis for some more moves at least. 12.Nf3 [After 12.Qxh7 cxd4 White can't take back in view of ...Qb4+, but 13.Qd3 remains balanced.] 12...cxd4



Position after: 12...cxd4

13.Be2 This latest try from the Latvian GM took place in Sveshnikov, E (2507) – Barglowski, F (2353) Warsaw (rapid) 2005 [13.Nxd4 and now either 13...f6 or 13...Qa3 14.Qg3 Bb7 should be checked; after the impatient jump 13.Ng5?! Black can apparently go for a perpetual check with 13...Qa3 or else try 13...f5].



Position after: 13.Be2

13...Ba6 All the following options deserve attention: 13...f5 [13...f6!?!; 13...Nc6 14.0-0 dxc3; and 13...dxc3 14.Ng5 c2 15.a3!? Nc6 16.Nxh7 Nd4 with a mess everywhere! – see notes to 11...Rf8]. 14.Bxa6 Nxa6 15.0-0 dxc3 16.Qxh7



Position after: 16.Qxh7

and now instead of the game continuation, 16...0-0-0, the engine suggests that Black should have anchored his offside knight on the central outpost d5, by means of 16...Nb4!.

8...axb6



Position after: 8...axb6

9.Nf3

9.Bd3 [9.Qg4!?] 9.Bd3 Ba6 10.Be4 Ra7 11.Nh3 d5 12.Bd3 c5 was pleasant for Black in Gukhvat, P (2248) – Polivanov, A (2383) Batumi 2018; the multifunctional rook on a7 can press against the isolated a-pawn and help Black's defense along the seventh rank, should Ng5 and Qh5 come.

9...Bb7 10.Bd3 d6 11.0-0 Be7 12.Re1 Nd7



Position after: 12...Nd7

13.Qe2

A) 13.Be4 Bxe4 14.Rxe4 Ra5 or 14...dxe5 is around equal too.

B) The same goes for 13.Bc2 Ra5!?. This aesthetic rook-lift prepares ...Qa8 and increases the pressure on e5. 14.Nd2?! [14.exd6=] 14...dxe5! 15.Nc4



Position after: 15.Nc4

15...Ra7³ This was played in the game Sveshnikov, E (2585) – Morozevich, A (2590) Alushta 1994 [in his annotations for ChessBase, GM Pavel Blatny indicated 15...Rd5 as a possible improvement, but things are murky after 16.Ne3. After 16.Be4 exd4 17.cxd4 Nf6 18.Bxd5 Qxd5©



Position after: 18...Qxd5©

Black has got very nice compensation for the exchange: one pawn, the two bishops and the better pawn structure. But is that better than what he got after 15...Ra7?].

13...dxe5

13...0-0!? was possible too, reckoning that Black has enough pressure on e5 and along the a-file to distract his opponent from a wild kingside assault, 14.dxe5



Position after: 14.dxe5

14...Ra5

Or 14...Nc5 15.Bc2 Qd5∞.

15.Bb5 Qa8

15...Bxf3 16.gxf3 Qa8∞/3; Black threatens ...c7-c6 and doesn't fear 17.Bxd7+ Kxd7, after which his king would be rather safe on c8.

16.Rd1 Bc6 17.c4 0-0 18.Nd4 Bxb5 19.cxb5 Nb8∞

Rozentalis, E (2575) – Krasenkow, M (2655) Lubniewice 1998.



Position after: 19...Nb8∞

Now ...Ra4 and ...Bc5 could be an idea, as well as ...Rd8 or even ...c7-c5. The position is unclear.

(back to the text) This thematic idea doesn't work nearly as well here as in 1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Ng8 3.d4 d6 4.Nf3 Bg4 5.h3 Bh5 6.e6, for instance.

g) 3.c4 Nb6 4.c5 Nd5 5.Nc3 c6

1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.c4 Nb6 4.c5 Nd5 5.Nc3 c6



Position after: 5...c6

This may not fully equalize, at least by computers' lofty standards. Now 6.Nxd5 plays into Black's hands as 6...c6xd5 (6...cxd5) vacates the c6-square for his remaining knight, which leaves 6.d4 and 6.Bc4 as the most sensible tries.

6.Bc4

6.d4

A) Black doesn't fear the swap Nxd5 which would free the c6-square for his other knight. The swap 6...Nxc3 should therefore be slightly inferior and result in a pleasant edge for White following 7.bxc3 d6 8.cxd6 exd6 9.Nf3².

B) 6...d6 7.cxd6 This helps Black's development but by now 7...Nxc3 followed by 8...dxc5 or 8...dxe5 had become a threat. 7...exd6 8.Nf3 [8.Bc4 Be6 is alright for Black.] 8...dxe5 9.dxe5 Nxc3 [On 9...Be6 the jump 10.Ng5 is a bit annoying.] 10.Qxd8+ Kxd8 11.bxc3²



Position after: 11.bxc3²

This ending looks innocent, the white pawn structure being even the worse one, but either 12.Bc4 or 12.Ng5 will yield White some initiative.

6...d6

6...Nxc3?! isn't quite sufficient to bring parity after 7.dxc3 d5 8.cxd6 exd6 9.Nf3 d5 10.Bd3². White has promising medium-term prospects on the kingside if his opponent castles there. Besides 0-0 followed by Bf4/ Re1, another worthy idea could be Qd2-f4.



Position after: 6...d6

7.Qb3

Trying to seize the initiative before the advanced pawns vanish. We have met an identical position, albeit with the inclusion of a2-a4 and ...a7-a5, under the 3.c4 Nb6 4.a4 section.

White has a better version of it in the present position since the b4-square hasn't been weakened.

A) 7.exd6 exd6! The most accurate. [7...Nxc3 8.dxc3 exd6 9.cxd6 Bxd6 10.Bg5! Qxg5 11.Qxd6



Position after: 11.Qxd6

is a tad better for White even though his opponent should manage to hold the ending resulting from 11...Qe7+ 12.Qxe7+ Kxe7.] 8.Nxd5 cxd5 9.Bxd5 dxc5= Now White has to go for either 10.Qb3 or 10.Qf3 in order to seek enough activity to compensate for his isolated d-pawn.

B) 7.cxd6 exd6 8.Qb3



Position after: 8.Qb3

At this crossroads 8...Qb6 is highly interesting.

B1) The pawn sacrifice offered by 8...Be7 looks somewhat too optimistic: 9.Nxd5 cxd5 10.Bxd5 0-0 11.Nf3 Nc6 12.e6 fxe6 13.Bxe6+

Bxe6 14.Qxe6+ Kh8 15.0-0².



Position after: 15.0-0²

Black is ahead in development but likely unable to generate serious threats, while White plays d2-d3 or d2-d4 followed by some bishop move.

B2) 8...dxe5 9.Nxd5



Position after: 9.Nxd5

B2.1) 9...cxd5 This capture proved reliable enough in Nicevski, R – Knezevic, M Skopje 1967 and a few other games afterwards. 10.Bxd5 Qc7 11.Nf3 Bd6 12.0-0 0-0 13.d3 Nc6 14.Be3 Nb4 15.Rac1 Qe7



Position after: 15...Qe7

This is how the above-mentioned Nicevski – Knezevic encounter went and it led to a rough equality.

B2.2) However Black may want to try confusing his opponent with the sharper 9...b5!? 10.Qc3 [10.Bxb5 cxb5 11.Qxb5+ Bd7f] 10...Be6 11.Qxe5 Na6 12.Nf4 or 12.Bb3 cxd5∞.

C) 7.Nxd5? cxd5 8.Bxd5 e6!



Position after: 8...e6!

And now both 9.Bf3 dxe5 and 9.exd6 exd5 10.d4 Nc6 give Black a sizeable edge.

7...Nd7

7...dxe5 is also appropriate. 8.Nxd5 cxd5 9.Bxd5 e6



Position after: 9...e6

Black temporarily sacrifices a pawn but White's c5-pawn will be easy prey if the queens get swapped. 10.Bxb7 Bxb7 11.Qxb7 Qd5! 12.Qc8+ Ke7 13.Qc7+ Kf6 [if he is happy with a draw Black has 13...Ke8= since if he is allowed to take on c5 or just develop ...Nc6 and then ...Be7 he will stand much better] 14.d4 Nc6 [14...exd4!?] 15.Nf3 Nxd4 16.Bg5+ Kg6 17.Nxe5+ Kxg5∞



Position after: 17...Kxg5∞

This happened in Sveshnikov – Palatnik Cheliabinsk 1974 and is 0.00 according to the computer after both 18.0-0 and 18.h4+. I leave it to you to dig further if you wish!

8.Nxd5


After 8.Bxd5 cxd5 9.exd6 Black has a choice between the quiet 9...exd6 10.Nxd5 Nxc5 and grabbing a pawn by means of 9...d4 10.Nd5 exd6.



Position after: 10...exd6

11.Nf3 [11.cxd6? Bxd6μ is pretty bad for White, whose knight is unstable in the center. Black will simply follow up with 12...0-0 and 13...Nc5.] 11...dxc5 12.0-0 Bd6 13.Re1+ Kf8 14.d3 h6 Stopping Bc1-g5 and intending to continue 15...Nb6. Owing to his lead in development and the awkwardly placed black king, White can undoubtedly claim decent compensation for the pawn, but generating serious threats is another question.

8...Nxc5

The good thing for Black in this line is that he doesn't need to remember by heart one long and unique line to get a playable position. On the contrary, he can choose from several branches of the tree of variations, depending on his taste. At this crossroads, for instance, 8...cxd5 is also acceptable: 

Position after: 8...cxd5

9.Bxd5 e6 10.Bxe6 fxe6 11.Qxe6+ Qe7 12.Qxe7+ Bxe7 [but not 12...Kxe7? 13.cxd6+ Kf7 14.Nf3± where the four pawns for the piece proved too many to block in Franzoni, G – Henttinen, M Graz 1978] 13.cxd6 Nxe5 14.dxe7 Nd3+ 15.Ke2 Bf5 All this happened in Schulz, W – Horn, P (2295) Germany 1983.



Position after: 15...Bf5

Despite being temporarily three pawns down, Black has enough compensation to make a draw the most “normal” outcome here. 16...Kxe7 followed by ...Rhe8 is on the cards, as well as ...Rac8, while b2-b3 could be answered by ...b7-b5 in order to meet Bc1-a3 with ...b5-b4.

9.Nc7+



Position after: 9.Nc7+

9...Kd7!

9...Qxc7?! would lead to a similar but somewhat worse version for Black following 10.Bxf7+ Kd8 11.Qe3.

10.Qe3 Kxc7 11.d4©

After the inferior 11.Bxf7?! Bf5 Black takes over the initiative.

11...d5

The weird position of the black monarch certainly gives White some compensation for his pawn, but is it enough?



Position after: 11...d5

h) 3.Nc3 --

1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.Nc3



Position after: 3.Nc3

3...e6

A) 3...c6 4.d4 This way White keeps some flexibility regarding his development, though naturally 4.Bc4, 4.Nf3 or even 4.Qf3 are playable.
4...d6



Position after: 4...d6

A1) On 5.Nf3 Bg4 or 5...dxe5 6.Nxe5 Nd7 Black should rather be happy with the inclusion of the moves Nb1-c3 and ...c7-c6 compared to respectively ^(to the line) 1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.Nf3 Bg4 and 1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.Nf3 dxe5 5.Nxe5. While those two extra moves are both useful, White may regret being unable to play c2-c4 later on.

A2) 5.f4 This looks like the critical test in my view. 5...Bf5



Position after: 5...Bf5

A2.1) 6.Nxd5 cxd5 7.Nf3 Nc6 8.Bd3 Bxd3 9.Qxd3 g6 [I prefer the bishop on the f8-a3 diagonal, where it won't bite on granite, therefore 9...e6.] 10.0-0 Bg7 11.Bd2² Zaitsev, I (2465) – Westerinen, H (2440) Moscow 1982.



Position after: 11.Bd2²

The white pawn chain restricts the rival bishop, which, despite being theoretically “good”, is for the time being inferior to its counterpart. The most important factor is here White's spatial advantage.

A2.2) 6.g4?! This double-edged thrust happened in Sharafiev, A (2443) – Kovalenko, I (2587) Moscow 2012, where Black reacted with ...Bd7, and now instead of (6...Bd7) 7.Bg2, White should have preferred 7.Ne4². In turn 6...Nxc3 7.bxc3



Position after: 7.bxc3

and now either 7...Be6 or 7...Be4 8.Nf3 dxe5 9.fxe5 Qd7 would have given mutual chances. If possible, Black will follow up with ...e6, ...c5 and ...Nc6, with the push ...h7-h5 always in the air.

A2.3) 6.Bd3! Getting rid of Black's active bishop looks like a fairly sound approach. I believe Black is closer to equality following other moves. 6...Qd7 7.a3 There were other ways to prevent the jump ...Nb4, but this one is sufficient for an enduring plus. 7...Nxc3 8.bxc3 Bxd3 9.Qxd3



Position after: 9.Qxd3

9...Qg4?! A bit over-optimistic, or foolhardy, especially given the temperament of the White player. [9...e6²] 10.Nh3! Qxg2 11.Rg1 Qd5

12.c4 Qa5+ 13.Bd2 Qc7 14.Ng5f Dubov, D (2666) – Yuffa, D (2502)
Kolomna 2016

B) The rare 3...Nb6?! doesn't appear very logical and indeed gives White an opportunity to gain the edge.



Position after: 3...Nb6?!

B1) It is for the time being unclear who will benefit from the inclusion of 4.a4!? a5, but my guess is that it shouldn't drastically change the assessment. Here you have an example: 5.d4 d6 6.Nf3 Bg4 7.h3 Bh5 8.g4



Position after: 8.g4

This compromising push, together with White's next, is clearly an attempt at refuting 3...Nb6. We will see that very same idea under 4.d4, and have already met it in the 2...Ng8 section of Chapter 1. 8...Bg6 9.e6! fxe6 10.Ng5 Qd7



Position after: 10...Qd7

Now in place of 11.Qe2? Nc6 12.Nxe6 Nb4, with a large advantage for Black in Zvjaginsev, V (2660) – Panarin, M (2558) St Petersburg (blitz) 2015, White should have preferred 11.Bd3!, when he emerges from the long, logical and yet unforced sequence that follows with a sizeable advantage: 11...Bxd3 12.Qxd3 Nc6 13.Nb5 [13.Nxh7!?] 13...Nb4 14.Qe2 h6 15.Nxe6 Nxc2+ 16.Kd1 Nxa1 17.Nbxc7+ Kf7 18.Qf3+ Kg8 19.Nxa8 Qxe6 20.Nxb6±.

B2) 4.d4 d6 5.Nf3 Simple and good. [5.exd6?! exd6 seems to be a worse version for White of ^(to the line)1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.c4 Nb6 5.exd6 exd6 and the same may well be true for 5...cxd6 compared with lines where White has thrown in c2-c4.]



Position after: 5.Nf3

B2.1) 5...Bg4 6.h3 Bh5 [The only explanation I see for 6...Bf5, as played in Bellini, F – Varga, Z Baden 1999, is that Black wants to withdraw his bishop along the c8-h3 diagonal if White now plays 7.g4. Compared to 5...Bf5 however, White has gotten the h2-h3 tempo for free, which can hardly be bad for him. The above-mentioned game continued 7.Bd3 Bxd3 8.Qxd3 e6 9.exd6 Bxd6 10.Ne4²; 6...Bxf3?! 7.Qxf3± just means that White has gained the pair of bishops and a space advantage for nothing.] 7.g4 [7.e6 is equally adequate] 7...Bg6



Position after: 7...Bg6

We reached an analogous position with the white knight on b1 and the b6-one on g8, in the 1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Ng8 section. In the current case White can't develop his light-squared bishop to c4, but he doesn't necessarily need that in order to claim a neat plus. 8.h4! This is stronger than the immediate 8.e6, since the advance of Black's h-pawn will emphasize the weakening of the g6-square: 8...h5 9.e6! Qc8 [or 9...fxe6 10.Bd3±] 10.exf7+ Bxf7 11.Ng5 Qxg4 12.Be2 Qf5 13.Rh3+–

Position after: 13.Rh3+– Haag, E – Csom I Budapest 1964 was already hopeless because Black couldn't cope with the threat of Rf3 and his pawn hanging at h5 in some lines.

B2.2) 5...Bf5 6.Bd3 Bxd3 7.Qxd3 e6²



Position after: 7...e6²

This is objectively the best Black can hope for in this line: a slightly worse position due to his space disadvantage and very few chances for

his opponent to do something really dumb in the opening, the position being rather simple.

Let's go back to 3...e6.



Position after: 3...e6

4.Nxd5

This move is quite safe but lacks a bit of ambition.

4.d4 Nxc3 5.bxc3 d6 This is how the game Byrne, R – Olafsson, F Lugano 1970 continued, and rightly so since Black needs to contest his opponent's spatial supremacy. White has a broad range of options, and we'll investigate two of them. You may like to analyze moves like 6.exd6 or the enterprising 6.Qg4 by yourself!

A) The faulty-looking 6.f4 was played in Tal, M – Gedevanishvili, D Pori 1970. In that case after the tempting 6...dxe5 7.fxe5 Qh4+ White can simply reply 8.Ke2, intending 9.Nf3 followed by 10.Bd3. His king, surrounded by all the white troops, is very safe and White can claim a strong center. Nevertheless Black is obviously OK here too, but if he dislikes that position he may go for 6...c5.

B) 6.Nf3



Position after: 6.Nf3

B1) 6...Be7?! allowed White more freedom in Groszpeter, A (2480) – Grunberg, S (2385) Bucharest 1980, which continued 7.Bd3 Nd7 8.0-0 dxe5 9.Nxe5 Nxe5 10.dxe5 Qd5 11.Re1 Bd7 12.Qg4². Black has the better pawn structure but also concerns with the safety of his king, which means that the initiative belongs to his opponent.

B2) 6...dxe5 (6...Nd7 may be good enough too) 7.Nxe5 Nd7 8.Nf3 c5 9.Bd3 Qc7 10.0-0 c4 11.Be2 Bd6 with rough equality.



Position after: 11...Bd6

The consequences of 10...c5-c4 are numerous: while Black now can't easily attack the enemy doubled pawns, he has secured himself a nice outpost on d5 and pushed back the white bishop. This last point implies that Black can now safely castle kingside.

4...exd5



Position after: 4...exd5

5.d4

5.Qf3 c6 6.d4 d6

A) 7.exd6 Bxd6 8.Bd3



Position after: 8.Bd3

Strick van Linschoten, H – Oskam, G, Netherlands 1922. We have a French Exchange where White might claim a small pull. He will likely continue Ne2 followed by Bf4, while Black could be well advised to bring his knight towards the kingside with ...Nd7-f6.

B) 7.Bf4 dxe5 Now 8.dxe5?! occurred in Starostits, I (2471) – Sulskis, S (2575) Tallinn 2010; the other recapture, 8.Bxe5, would possibly have yielded White a tiny plus.

5...d6



Position after: 5...d6

6.Nf3

6.Bf4 dxe5! Doubtlessly best whereas after for example 6...Bf5 7.Bd3, Starck, I – Seils, G Cottbus 1983, or 6...c5 7.Bb5+ Nc6 8.Qe2 as in Kauschmann, H – Paulsen, D Berlin 1987, White can speed up his development and create some annoying little threats. 7.dxe5 c5 8.Nf3 Nc6 9.c3 h6 10.Bd3 Be6



Position after: 10...Be6

We are following Goloshchapov, A – Varga, Z Miskolc 2004. The center being closed, White must think twice before castling one side or the other, since his opponent could leave his king on e8 and start an attack on the wing. On 11.0-0, for instance, Black would likely reply 11...g5, and if 12.Bg3 then 12...Be7 followed by ...h6-h5. 11.h3 This move is just a waste of time, passing the initiative into Black's hands. 11...Be7 12.Qd2?! [12.a3, contemplating b2-b4, would have avoided the problems that soon arrive.] 12...Qb6 13.Rb1 d4!f



Position after: 13...d4!f

It's quite obvious that Black has won the opening battle. White has to be very careful to keep the balance. 14.a3 [14.cxd4? c4+ with a double threat wins on the spot for Black.] 14...g5 15.Bg3 0-0-0 Black is in the driver's seat.

6...Nc6!

6...dxe5 7.Nxe5 Nd7 8.Bd3 Nxe5 9.dxe5 This proved a tad better for White in Marciano, D (2455) – Bricard, E (2485) Toulouse 1995, notably because he could develop some initiative on the kingside.

7.c3 Be7 8.Bd3



Position after: 8.Bd3

8...Bg4!

Threatening to grab the e5-pawn.

8...a6 appeared in the Cuban duel Gonzalez Vidal, Y (2481) – Nogueiras Santiago, J (2482) Santa Clara 2004, which continued 9.h3 Be6 10.Bf4 g5?!.



Position after: 10...g5?!

Black plays in the same vein as in Goloshchapov – Varga, but under less favorable circumstances: his pawn on c7 rather than c5 implies that his queen is less active and there will be no opposition Qd1/Rd8 should Black castle long later on. 11.Bg3 Qd7 12.exd6 cxd6 13.h4± And Black had to make further structural concessions.

9.Qb3

9.exd6 and 9.Bf4 should be around equal.

9...0-0 10.Qxb7 Qe8,,



Position after: 10...Qe8,,

Black's forces are fully mobilized and he has enough play for the invested pawn.

i) 3.Nc3 Nxc3 4.bxc3

1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.Nc3 Nxc3!

According to some quick research in my database, where both belligerents were rated over 2300, around 300 games out of some 450 continued this way. I have therefore commented only briefly on the alternatives to the swap (see the previous subchapter).

4.bxc3



Position after: 4.bxc3

With this capture towards the center, a bit less popular than 4.dxc3, White pays more attention to structural issues than he does playing 4.dxc3. In return, his piece play may be labelled as being less “fluid”. Obviously Black can now consider several approaches.

4...d5

A) 4...d6 5.f4



Position after: 5.f4

5...g6 Twenty percent of the around 950 database games follow this path, which can thus be considered the main line. I am not convinced, however, that its value is higher than those of other sensible alternatives. At any rate, if Black wants to fianchetto his bishop, starting with 5...c5 should come to the same thing, [5...Nc6 6.d4 Bf5 7.Rb1 dxe5 8.fxe5 e6 9.Nf3 Na5 10.Bd3² Black had failed to equalize in Zvjaginsev, V (2674) – Savchenko, B (2583) Serpukhov 2007.] 6.Nf3 Bg7 7.d4 0-0 8.Bd3 c5 9.0-0 dxe5 White must now decide how to recapture.



Position after: 9...dxe5

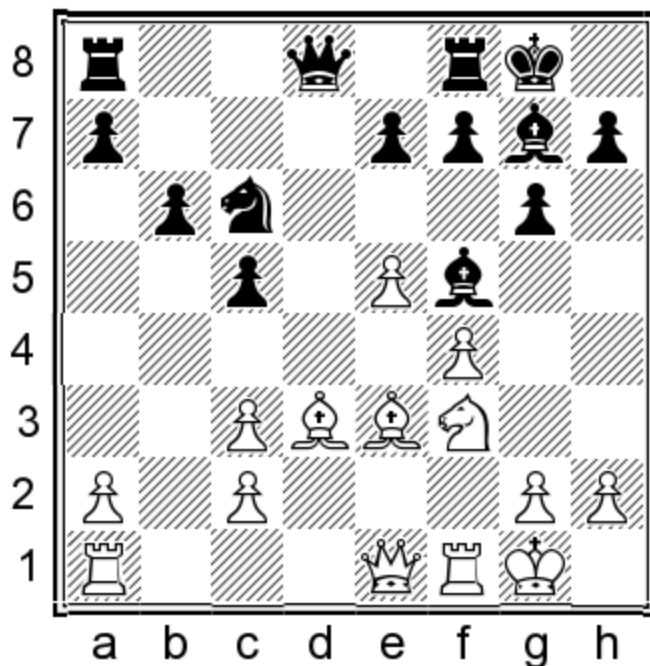
A1) My feeling is that after 10.fxe5 play will be more forcing, with Black getting a sort of “Grunfeldesque” counterplay. Some lines to illustrate this assertion follow. 10...Nc6 11.Be4



Position after: 11.Be4

11...Qa5 [or 11...Bg4 12.Be3 Qa5 13.Qe1 Rad8 when Black’s position is easy to play and sound: just increase the pressure on d4!] 12.Bg5 h6 13.Bh4 Qxc3 14.Bxc6 bxc6 15.Bxe7 cxd4 16.Bxf8 Bxf8© This gave Black sufficient compensation for the exchange in Klugel, J (2535) – Marcinkiewicz, J (2420) ICCF corr 1997.

A2) 10.dxe5 Nc6 11.Be3 b6 [maybe 11...Qa5 is an improvement, as it seems Black doesn’t need his queen to defend the kingside following 12.Qe1 Bf5 13.Bxf5 gxf5 14.Nh4 e6 15.Rf3 Ne7∞] 12.Qe1 Bf5 This was Tirard, H (2451) – Spraggett, K (2580) Metz 2010.



Position after: 12...Bf5

White now, probably wrongly, refrained from the capture 13.Bxf5 gxf5 which seems to give him slightly better prospects after 14.Rd1 Qc8 15.Qe2 Qe6 16.Ng5 Qg6 17.Rd3².

B) 4...c5

B1) 5.f4 Nc6 6.d4 d5! 7.Nf3 Bg4



Position after: 7...Bg4

8.Be2 We are following Yudasin, L (2605) – Ehlvest, J (2620), Biel 1993. White emerged slightly worse from the opening. [The engine suggests 8.Rb1 Rb8 9.Bb5 instead of the text move. That might have kept the balance, but not more, after either 9...a6 or 9...e6.] 8...e6 9.0-0 Be7 10.h3 Bh5 11.Rb1 Qc7?! [11...Rb8!³] 12.Be3?! [Missing 12.c4![∞].] 12...c4³ Black prevents the advance of White's c-pawn.

B2) 5.d4 d5 6.exd6 exd6 7.dxc5



Position after: 7.dxc5

7...Qe7+ [Despite White's structural weaknesses, the endgame ensuing after 7...dxc5 8.Qxd8+ Kxd8 9.Bf4 would have favored him; 7...Nc6! was a smart pawn sacrifice which White may even be best advised to decline, since after 8.cxd6 Bxd6© Black has very easy play: ...0-0, ...Qc7 or...Qf6, ...Bg4 and so on.] 8.Be2 dxc5 9.Nf3 Qc7 10.0-0 Be7



Position after: 10...Be7

This occurred in Zvjaginsev, V (2666) – Shimanov, A (2565) St Petersburg 2011, when White played 11.g3. [11.Bd3 0-0 12.Qe2² would

have given White some attacking chances on the kingside, and thus slightly better prospects.]



Position after: 4...d5

5.d4

Trying to disturb Black with 5.Ba3 isn't stupid, though the bishop may end up misplaced. 5...b6 [5...g6 is interesting, whereas after the cooperative 5...e6?! 6.Bxf8 Kxf8 or ...Rxf8 White has achieved his goal.] 6.d4 Qd7 [6...c5!? 7.dxc5 e6∞] 7.Rb1 Ba6 8.Bxa6 Nxa6 9.Qe2 Qa4 10.e6



Position after: 10.e6

This was nebulous in Tirard, H (2491) – Krasenkow, M (2668) France 2007, where of course the bishop was taboo because of 10...Qxa3?? 11.Qb5+ with a mate in two.

5...c5 6.Nf3 Nc6 7.Be2



Position after: 7.Be2

7...Bg4

7...e6 A curious French Winawer has arisen, where instead of having traded his dark-squared bishop for the enemy knight, Black managed to exchange his king's knight. As White I would here consider 8.h4!? since if Black is allowed to follow up with ...Be7, ...0-0 and then ...f7-f6 he should have no worries at all.

8.Rb1 Qd7

Black should definitely sidestep 8...Rb8? 9.e6! Bxe6 10.Bf4 Rc8 11.Rxb7f
Baklan, V (2552) – Miroshnichenko, E (2500) Alushta 1999.



Position after: 8...Qd7

9.dxc5

9.c4?! proved too optimistic in Baklan, V (2595) – Almeida Quintana, O (2445) Solsones 2004, which continued 9...dxc4! 10.d5 [10.dxc5 Qxd1+ 11.Bxd1 0-0-0 and Black stands indubitably better.] 10...Bxf3 11.Bxf3 Nxe5



Position after: 11...Nxe5

12.Be2 [Provoking ...g7-g6, in the hope that Bb2 could then cause Black some annoyance, wouldn't improve White's fate much: 12.Bh5 g6 13.Be2 Qc7 and Black is clearly better.] 12...0-0-0 with a significant advantage to Black.

9...Bxf3 10.Bxf3 e6 11.c4 Nxe5 12.cxd5 Bxc5 13.0-0 Rd8=

With further simplifications and a probable drawish endgame to come.



Position after: 13...Rd8=

j) 3.Nc3 Nxc3 4.dxc3

1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.Nc3 Nxc3 4.dxc3



Position after: 4.dxc3

This move is compromising in the sense that after a subsequent ...d7-d6xe5 White runs the risk of having a lost pawn endgame because of Black's kingside majority. On the bright side, 4.dxc3 opens up the c1-h6 diagonal, thus gaining time to develop the dark-squared bishop. This line is a bit tricky in my view because White's activity should not be underestimated, and far from all endings are bad for him. Now, while 4...g6 and 4...d5 are certainly playable, I will just say a few words on the latter and instead focus on 4...Nc6 and 4...d6, which in most cases will come to the same thing.

4...Nc6

A) 4...d5 White is spoilt for choice here, but he cannot at the same time prevent both ...c7-c5 and ...Bc8-f5, two moves that fit into Black's plans. 5.Be3 was played in Predke, A (2611) – Berkes, F (2666) European Ch Skopje 2019, and the thrust 5.c2-c4 is interesting [while after 5.Bd3 c5 Black may consider a later ...c5-c4, to enable ...Bc8-f5, should his opponent prevent ...Bc8-g4]. 5...Bf5



Position after: 5...Bf5

6.Bd3 [I see no reason why 6.g4?! should be good here, while Black could answer 6.h4 with either 6...h5 or 6...Qd7.] 6...Bxd3 7.cxd3 [7.Qxd3 wasn't stupid either, especially since White creates the immediate threat of 8.Qb5+ and could get rid of his doubled pawns at his leisure with c3-c4.] 7...e6 8.Qg4 Nc6 [Including the c-pawn in the battle with 8...c5 strongly came into consideration.] 9.Nf3 Ne7



Position after: 9...Ne7

White stood perhaps a bit better owing to his space advantage, but given the solidity of the black bastions he didn't insist long before agreeing a draw.

B) Starting with 4...d6



Position after: 4...d6

(rather than 4...Nc6) dissuades White from playing 5.f4, since after 5...dxe5 6.Qxd8+ Kxd8 7.fxe5 he would be left with an isolated e-pawn. As f2-f4 rarely comes into the equation in this line anyway, I suppose this nuance isn't too relevant.

B1) White can set more (crude) traps with 5.Bc4 but objectively this move is inferior. 5...Nc6 [Of course not 5...dxe5?? 6.Bxf7+.] 6.Nf3



Position after: 6.Nf3

B1.1) 6...Bg4?? 7.Bxf7+! Trap number two leads after 7...Kxf7 8.Ng5+ Ke8 9.Qxg4 Nxe5 10.Qe4 to an almost decisive advantage for White.

B1.2) If Black dislikes endgames he may go for the much riskier 6...g6!? 7.Bf4 Bg7



Position after: 7...Bg7

and now 8.Qe2 0-0 9.0-0-0 or 8.Ng5 0-0 9.e6 f6 10.Nf7 Qe8. In both cases the resulting positions are unclear. Note that Black may be able to rule out this option of 8.Ng5 if he starts with 4...g6.

B1.3) 6...dxe5! On 7.Qe2 [7.Qxd8+ Nxd8 8.Nxe5 f6 9.Nd3 e5 was at least equal for Black in Nezhmetdinov, R – Spassky, B, Tbilisi 1959] Black's best is the greedy 7...f6!, while a cowardly approach with 7...e6?! 8.Nxe5 Nxe5 9.Qxe5, as in Basman, M – Smyslov, V Lugano 1968, leaves White a bit better according to the engine.



Position after: 7...f6!

8.Nh4 [In the event of the flashy 8.Bh6 Black should keep his cool and decline the gift. 8...e6 9.Rd1 Now 9...Qe7 10.Be3 Qf7 proved safe and fine for Black in McDonald, N (2385) – Sutter, O (2250), Zug 1991. The more ambitious 9...Bd6 10.Bxg7 Rg8 11.Bh6 f5 could be even more promising; if Black is given time for ...Qf6, ...Bd7 and ...0-0-0 his position will just be great.] 8...g6 9.f4 e6 10.Nf3 Bd6 11.fxe5 Nxe5 12.Nxe5 Bxe5



Position after: 12...Bxe5

This occurred in Venkatesh, M (2432) – Zinchenko, Y (2531) Bhubaneswar 2009, where after 13.Bg5 Black could have secured an edge by means of ...Bxh2. If instead White prevents the short castling with 13.Bh6, then 13...Bd7 14.0-0-0 Qe7 15.Qe3 c5 should eventually lead to Black consolidating his extra pawn once he has castled long.

B2) I thought a point of playing 5.Bf4 first could be to have f2-f4 available in the endgame, should Black erect the ...f7-f6/...e7-e5 barrier. That seems, however, to fall short: 5...dxe5 6.Qxd8+ [6.Bxe5 could be better] 6...Kxd8 7.0-0-0+ Bd7 8.Bxe5 f6 9.Bg3 e5



Position after: 9...e5

and now on White's intended 10.f4 the reply 10...e4 is simply fine according to the computer.

B3) 5.Nf3 dxe5 [5...Nc6 is likely to transpose into either 5.Bc4 or 5.Bf4. This knight move also receives my preference and could well be objectively better than 5...dxe5.] 6.Qxd8+ Kxd8 7.Nxe5 Ke8



Position after: 7...Ke8

B3.1) Here we see another attempt which failed to bring White much. 8.Bb5+ Bd7 [After 8...c6 9.Bc4 it is questionable whether White has really improved on 8.Bc4, but that is another story.] 9.Nxd7 Nxd7 10.Bf4 c6 11.Be2 e6 12.c4 [Or 12.0-0-0 Bc5 13.Bg3 Nf6Ne4; I don't see any problems here for Black.] 12...Bc5 13.c3 Ke7 14.Rd1 a5=



Position after: 14...a5=

Rozentalis, E (2570) – Volzhin, A (2556) Zakopane 2000. The bishop is stabilized on c5 since a2-a3 could be answered by ...a5-a4. White's pair of bishops compensates for his worse pawn structure, but not more.

B3.2) 8.Bc4 Developing with gain of time is tempting and by far White's most frequent choice, but in my view it causes Black no concern at all. 8...e6 9.Bf4 Bd6



Position after: 9...Bd6

10.Bg3 [Or 10.0-0-0 Nd7 11.Rhe1 Ke7=. Keep in mind that White can't afford to exchange all the pieces!] 10...Nd7= Tarrasch, S – Reti, R Baden-Baden 1925.

B3.3) 8.Be3! This move, together with the retreat 8.Nc4 which anticipates ...f7-f6 followed by ...e7-e5, could prove more promising than White's most frequent choice, namely 8.Bc4. 8...e6 [in the event of 8...f6 9.Nc4 White could welcome 9...e5?! with 10.f4!?!; whereas after 8...Nd7 9.Nc4 Nb6 10.0-0-0 he doesn't equalize so easily either] 9.0-0-0 Nd7 10.Bb5 Bd6 11.Nc4



Position after: 11.Nc4

Black was under pressure in Sedlak, N (2553) – Spraggett, K (2597) Vrsac 2008. This confirms my previous assertion that despite White's

doubled pawns not all endgames are worse for him.
Back to 4...Nc6.



Position after: 4...Nc6

5.Nf3

A) 5.f4 d6 6.Nf3 Bg4 or 6...g6 and Black will get counterplay. If he wants to deny his opponent this extra option of 5.f4, Black should start with 4...d6.

B) 5.Bf4 d6 – see 5.Nf3 d6.

5...d6 6.Bf4



Position after: 6.Bf4

Black is at a crossroads now with an important decision to make, depending on his taste. Here we have some examples of his different options.

6...dxe5

The clearest, if not only, path to full equality.

A) I am skeptical about Black's chances to equalize after 6...Bg4?!.



Position after: 6...Bg4?!

A1) 7.h3!?

A1.1) 7...dxe5? 8.Qxd8+ Rxd8 9.Nxe5 and the c7-pawn is going to drop.

A1.2) Even worse is the greedy 7...Bxf3? 8.Qxf3 dxe5 9.Rd1 Qc8 10.Bb5 Qe6. Black needs only one tempo to complete his development, by means of ...g6 and ...Bg7, but now comes 11.0-0!! exf4 12.Rfe1 Qh6 13.Qd5 Qd6 14.Qb3

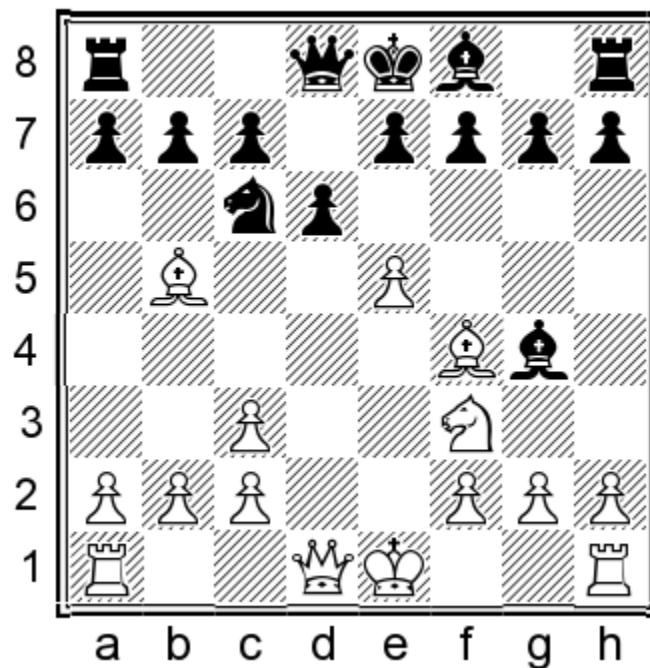


Position after: 14.Qb3

Objectively, Black should now limit the damage and sadly sacrifice his queen with 14...e6. But that would prevent me from showing you the cute end of the winning sequence! 14...Qc5 15.Ba4! Rb8 16.Re5!! [or 14...Qf6 15.Ba4 Rb8 16.Qd5 Qd6 and now the hammer blow 17.Qa5!! followed by 18.Qxc7 or Qxa7].

A1.3) 7...Bh5 Now 8.Bb5 is seemingly best, whereas the thematic pawn sacrifice 8.e6?! fxe6∞ fails to impress for once.

A2) 7.Bb5



Position after: 7.Bb5

A2.1) 7...e6 is playable, when forcing matters doesn't seem to bring White much: 8.h3 Bh5 9.g4 Bg6 10.Nd4 dxe5.



Position after: 10...dxe5

This looks quite scary for Black but he does hold here after either 11.Qf3 Qd5 or 11...exd4 12.Bxc6+ bxc6 13.Qxc6+ Ke7, while 11.Nxc6 Qxd1+ 12.Rxd1 exf4 is even better for him according to the machine.

A2.2) 7...Qd7 8.h3



Position after: 8.h3

8...Bh5 Retaining the light-squared bishop doesn't solve Black's problems, as the following lines demonstrate. [8...Bxf3 9.Qxf3 a6 10.Ba4 e6 11.0-0-0 This gave White a pleasant edge in Kollars, D (2549) – Kreisl, R (2404) Riga 2018.] 9.exd6 cxd6 [9...exd6?! 10.0-0 Be7 11.Re1 and now Black should probably part with his bishop anyway since 11...0-0 12.g4! Bg6 13.Ne5f becomes awkward for him] 10.Qd5 e5 11.g4 Bg6 12.0-0-0 Now Black can't accept the gift as 12...exf4?? 13.Ne5 would be crushing, but after 12...0-0-0 13.Be3 White is on top.

B) 6...e6 7.Bb5 a6 8.Bxc6+ bxc6 9.Qe2 Be7 10.0-0-0 0-0 [10...c5!?!] 11.h4!?! White could have tried to provoke ...d6-d5, by means of 11.Qe4 for instance. 11...f6 12.exd6 cxd6∞



Position after: 12...cxd6∞

This happened in Sveshnikov, E – Caspi, I Israel 2011, when after 13.Nd4 Qd7 14.Rhe1 e5 15.Qc4+ Black should have refrained from 15...d5 16.Qxc6 Ra7 17.Qxd7 Bxd7© but preferred instead 15...Rf7! 16.Nxc6 Bf8³.

C) 6...g6 7.Bc4 Bg7 Another transposition, this time into 4...d6 5.Bc4 Nc6 6.Nf3 g6.

7.Qxd8+ Nxd8 8.Bxe5 c6 9.0-0-0 f6



Position after: 9...f6

10.Bg3

On 10.Bc7 both 10...Bd7 and 10...Bg4 should be adequate. 11...Rc8 or 11...e7-e5 may follow, so that White will have to remove his dark-squared bishop anyway.

10...e5

Black found himself cramped following 10...Be6?! 11.Bd3 g6 12.Rhe1 Bf7 13.Nd4² in Sebastian, D (2445) – Appel, R (2513) Germany 2016.



Position after: 10...e5

11.Bc4

This could be the best try at extracting a small edge out of the opening, but precise play earns Black his share of chances here too.

11.Nd2 Ne6 12.Bc4 Bd7 13.Ne4 0-0-0 14.Nd6+ Bxd6 15.Rxd6 Rhe8 16.f3 Kc7= ½-½ Regan, K (2430) – Rogoff, K (2520) Pasadena 1978. Black's extra half-pawn fully compensates for the enemy bishop pair.

11...Nf7!

11...Ne6?! calls for an imminent piece sacrifice on e5, which 11...b5 12.Bb3 would merely postpone by one move. 12.Rhe1 Kf7



Position after: 12...Kf7

White now has a choice between 13.Bxe5 fxe5 14.Nxe5+ Ke7 15.Re4 and 13.Rd8 Ke7 14.Rxc8 Rxc8 15.Nxe5 fxe5 16.Rxe5 Re8 17.Rxe6+ Kd7 18.Rxe8 Kxe8 19.Be5². With two pawns for the exchange and the black pieces paralyzed, White is surely better here.

12.Rhe1



Position after: 12.Rhe1

12...Be7!

12...g6?? resulted in a quick disaster for Black in Roos, L – Schmidt, W (2505) Bagneux 1978: 13.Bxe5! Nxe5 14.Nxe5 Bh6+ 15.Kb1 fxe5 16.Rxe5+ Kf8 17.Rd8+ Kg7 18.Re7+ Kf6 19.Rf7+ Kg5 20.Rxh8 1-0.

13.Nd2 h5 14.h3

14.f4!?

14...h4 15.Bh2



Position after: 15.Bh2

This happened in Malbran, G (2386) – Soppe, G (2448) Villa Martelli 1999, where Black would have maintained the balance had he persisted in stopping f2-f4, with either **15...g5** or **15...Nd6**, intending 16.f4?! e4!.

(back to the text) Black should rather be happy with the inclusion of the moves Nb1-c3 and ...c7-c6 compared to respectively 1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.Nf3 Bg4 and 1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.Nf3 dxe5 5.Nxe5.

(back to the text) 1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.c4 Nb6 5.exd6 exd6 and the same may well be true for 5...cxd6 compared with lines where White has thrown in c2-c4

Chapter 3

Four Pawns Attack

1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.c4 Nb6 5.f4

Chapter Guide

Chapter 3 – Four Pawns Attack

This chapter is smaller than the other ones because I have chosen to include the Classical Line as well as the refuted line 1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.c4 Nb6 5.f4 dxe5 6.fxe5 c5 7.d5 e6? in the Bonus Lines chapter. I find the somewhat provocative approach based on a kingside fianchetto attractive for Black because of its imbalance and the rather clear ways for him to gain counterplay. I see the main line of the Classical as a slightly more solid but also more passive way to counter White's ambitious play: there Black mostly waits for his opponent to show his hand, in my opinion.

1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.c4 Nb6 5.f4

a) 5...dxe5 6.fxe5 c5 7.d5 g6

b) 5...dxe5 6.fxe5 g6 7.Nc3 Bg7 8.--

c) 5...dxe5 6.fxe5 g6 7.Nc3 Bg7 8.c5

d) 5...g6 6.Nc3 Bg7 7.Be3 --

e) 5...g6 6.Nc3 Bg7 7.Be3 Be6 8.--

f) 5...g6 6.Nc3 Bg7 7.Be3 Be6 8.Nf3

Appendix: Topalov – Bauer 2021

a) 5...dxe5 6.fxe5 c5 7.d5 g6

1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.c4 Nb6 5.f4



Position after: 5.f4

This can be considered White's most aggressive setup vs the Alekhine. On the bright side for Black is the fact that he should get opportunities to get

his share of play, since the white expansion creates weaknesses. For that purpose Black needs to act resolutely.

5...dxe5 6.fxe5 c5 7.d5 g6



Position after: 7...g6

With 250 games out of around 1000, this line is a rather rare bird in comparison with 7...e6. Compared to 6...g6, by playing ...c7-c5 before the fianchetto, Black denies his opponent two important options: the capture dxc5 and further expansion with c4-c5.

8.Nc3

As a rule of thumb, White has to delay the natural developing-move Ng1-f3 in order to rule out the pin ...Bc8-g4.

8...Bg7 9.Bf4 0-0



Position after: 9...0-0

10.Qd2

A) 10.Nf3?! Bg4 11.h3 Asking the bishop at once is best, as White at least speeds up his long castling. **11...Bxf3 12.Qxf3 N8d7!**



Position after: 12...N8d7!

It seems smart to attack the white e-pawn as quickly as possible. A subsequent d5-d6 or e5-e6 will open files, and since Black is the better developed side, he has more chances to draw profit from that.

A1) 13.Qe3

A1.1) In the event of the dubious 13...e6?!, pushing 14.d6! is promising for White [but White erred with 14.0-0-0? exd5³ in Bulmaga, I (2360) – Foisor, M (2215) Sarata Monteoru 2012].



Position after: 14.d6!

14...f6 [Then 14...Nb8? is most likely too slow because of 15.h4 Nc6 16.h5 Nd7 17.0-0-0.



Position after: 17.0-0-0

Quite funnily, if one compares this with the previous diagram, the black position is almost identical while White has played three attacking moves! The e5-pawn does fall, but White's assault should be decisive.] 15.0-0-0 Nxe5 16.Bxe5 fxe5 17.Ne4 Nd7 18.Be2©



Position after: 18.Be2©

White has very good compensation for the invested pawn and the computer assesses this position as “+2” for him.

A1.2) 13...Qb8! 14.0-0-0 [14.e6 Ne5 15.exf7+ Rxf7³ Panarin, M (2486) – Polaczek, R (2365) playchess.com 2005] 14...Bxe5 15.g3 Re8∞

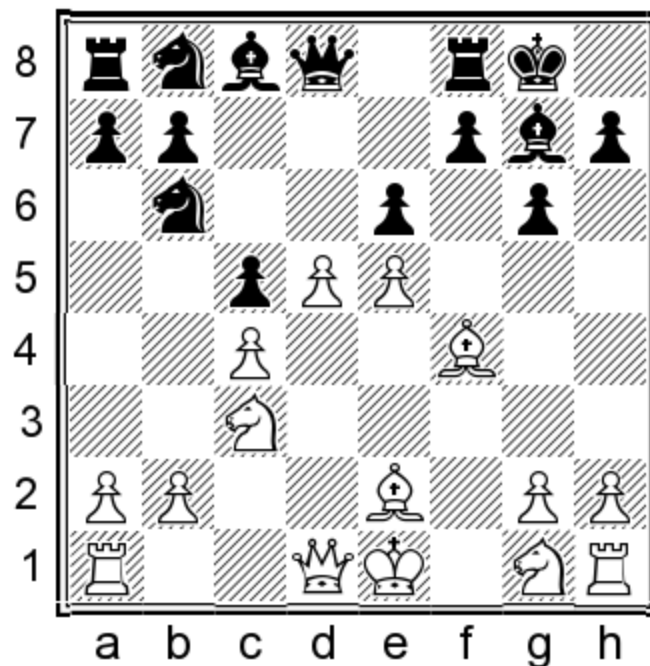
A2) 13.Qe4 Black has available many different ways to increase the pressure on the enemy e-pawn. Now 13...Qc7, 13...e6, and 13...f6 are all playable but my preference goes to 13...Qb8, which forces 14.e6.



Position after: 14.e6

14...Ne5∞ [14...Be5!? could be acceptable too but following 15.Bxe5 Nxe5 16.0-0-0 White will quickly advance his h-pawn, which could prove troublesome. On 16...fxe6? 17.Re1! is annoying.] Back to 14...Ne5; White has several sensible replies, but he must lose time with his bishop because ...fxe6 dxe6 ...Rxf4 Qxf4 ...Nd3+ is a big threat. This is good news for Black since it means another tempo to do something constructive.

B) 10.Be2!? e6



Position after: 10...e6

B1) 11.Nf3

B1.1) 11...f6? 12.d6! [12.exf6? Bxf6∞ only helped Black find counterplay in Turpanov, M – Nataf, I Bratislava 1993; but 12.Be3!? could be tried too.] 12...Nc6 13.0-0




Position after: 13.0-0

Now 13...fxe5 14.Bg5 is clearly better for White, so is 13...Nxe5 14.Nxe5 fxe5 15.Be3±.

B1.2) 11...exd5 12.cxd5 Bg4 13.0-0 N8d7,,


Position after: 13...N8d7,,


This quite tense position is reminiscent of the Four Pawns King's Indian, (to the line) 1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 g6 3.Nc3 Bg7 4.e4 d6 5.f4 0-0 6.Nf3 c5 7.d5 e6 8.Be2 exd5 9.cxd5 and so on. Play is quite concrete and tactical, but from a theoretical standpoint the machine is satisfied with Black's prospects. Some sample lines, out of myriads of possibilities, follow. 14.Re1 [14.Qe1? allowed 14...Bxf3 15.Bxf3 Nxe5!µ in Moraru, M (2408) – Grunberg, M (2375) Bucharest 1999. Black won an important pawn because of the pin along the e-file in the event of 16.Bxe5 Re8.; 14.d6, on the other hand, deserves attention. For instance, 14...Bxf3 15.Bxf3 Nxe5 16.Bxb7 Rb8 17.Ba6 Nec4,, Soentges, K (2437) – Polaczek, R (2500) IECG email 1999.] 14...Re8 [14...Bxf3!? 15.Bxf3 Nc4,,] 15.d6


Position after: 15.d6

This was Bierwisch, B (2410) – Vasile, C (2340) ICCF corr 1988, where Black played 15...a6 [better was 15...Bxf3! 16.Bxf3 Bxe5³].

B2) 11.d6 Is less frequent but fairly OK too.

B2.1) 11...g5!? looks weird but after 12.Be3 Nc6 or 12...N8d7 the chances are reciprocal.

B2.2) 11...Nc6 12.Nf3 Nd7 The e5-pawn is doomed but the game remains pretty unclear. 13.Qd2 [13.Bg5 Qb6 is alright for Black.] 13...Ndxe5 14.Nxe5 Nxe5


Position after: 14...Nxe5

15.h4 or 15.0-0-0∞ The immediate threat of 16.Bxe5 Bxe5 17.d7 could prompt Black to continue 15...b6, when 16.h4 is complicated.

B3) 11.Qd2!? exd5 12.cxd5 Now 12...Re8 was unclear but eventually brought Black victory in Bechtel, P – Horn, P (2280) Geneva 1994 [the alternative is 12...Bg4!?!].

Let's return to 10.Qd2.



Position after: 10.Qd2

10...e6

A critical moment for White to decide between allowing 11...exd5 and preventing it. It seems the latter option could be the more challenging for Black.

With 10...Bf5? Black would possibly be ready to lose a tempo after a subsequent Nf3 Bg4, which is already a questionable decision, but 11.h3! refutes the whole concept altogether. The threat is obviously g2-g4 and following 11...g5 12.Bxg5 Bxe5 13.0-0-0 Iljiushenok, I (2533) – Shapiro, V (2249) St Petersburg 2019 White had a large edge as he would be faster with his attack on the kingside.

11.0-0-0

11.Be2 exd5 12.cxd5 Re8 transposes to Bechtel – Horn.

11.d6 Nc6 12.Nf3 Nd7 We have at this stage a further split between 13.0-0-0 and 13.Qe3, the latter apparently requiring more effort from Black.



Position after: 12...Nd7

A) 13.0-0-0 Ncxe5 14.Nxe5 [here and from now on h4!? represents at every moment a candidate move] 14...Bxe5 15.Bxe5 Nxe5 16.Qe3 Ng4 [16...Qf6 17.Ne4 Qg7 Is interesting too] 17.Qxc5 [17.Qg3!?] 17...b6 18.Qd4 Qg5+ 19.Qd2 Qxd2+ 20.Rxd2 Bb7



Position after: 20...Bb7

This position, from Migot, T (2331) – Sergeev, V (2436) Pardubice 2013, is around equal. The white passed pawn shouldn't bother Black too much since if it advances further Black could attack it four times and eventually gobble it.

B) 13.Qe3

B1) 13...f6



Position after: 13...f6

B1.1) 14.exf6 Nxf6!∞ Recapturing with the knight is a novelty that seems more to the point than 14...Qxf6?! 15.Bg5 Qf7 16.0-0-0 Nd4



Position after: 16...Nd4

17.Bd3! Jansen, J (2395) – Marcinkiewicz, J (2427) France 2002. This looks stronger than the eye-catching exchange sacrifice 17.Nxd4 cxd4 18.Rxd4 Bxd4 19.Qxd4 b6 when after the further 20.Bh6 Bb7 21.Bxf8 Rxf8© it is Black who is down a pawn for some compensation. After 17.Bd3 White stands on top, while if we return to 14...Nxf6, Black has in mind 15.Qxc5 Ne4! 16.Nxe4 Rxf4, which remains unclear in my opinion.

B1.2) 14.0-0-0! Nd4! Your engine may show some preference for White here, but I wouldn't draw hasty conclusions: both sides have chances

here [14...Ndx5?! 15.Nxe5 fxe5 16.Bg5 Qd7 17.h4 Nd4 18.h5± is a worse version of 14.h4 for Black].

B1.3) Finally there is 14.h4!? Ndx5 15.Bxe5 fxe5 16.0-0-0 Nd4 17.h5©



Position after: 17.h5©

An attack and a nice outpost on e4 are ample compensations for a mere (doubled) pawn, but can White deliver mate without his dark-squared bishop? A later ...e5-e4 could revive the bishop on g7, or enable Black to swap queens via ...Qxd6 and ...Qf4. In my view this position is quite double-edged.

B2) 13...Nd4 14.0-0-0 [14.Nxd4 cxd4 15.Qxd4 Qa5∞ White can't hang on to his extra pawn.] 14...f6



Position after: 14...f6

15.h4 Here 15.Bd3!? and 15.exf6!? also deserve consideration. Obviously I can't analyze all available options for both sides in those sharp lines. If you do, my tip is to let the engine run for a while before drawing conclusions, since at the start it shows skepticism about the black position in general. 15...fxe5 16.Bg5



Position after: 16.Bg5

16...Qa5 This happened in Finkel, A (2500) – Grunberg, M (2411) Jerusalem 2013. [16...Nf5 looks like an improvement over Black's treatment. Then 17.Qd2 Qa5 and 17.Qe1 Qe8 18.Ne4 b6 19.h5 gxh5 20.Bd3 Bb7 are pretty difficult to assess.] There instead of 17.Bd3 White should perhaps have preferred the straightforward 17.h5.

11...exd5!

I prefer this over 11...f6, when again pushing 12.d6 seems a bit more testing than 12.Nf3.

12.cxd5



Position after: 12.cxd5

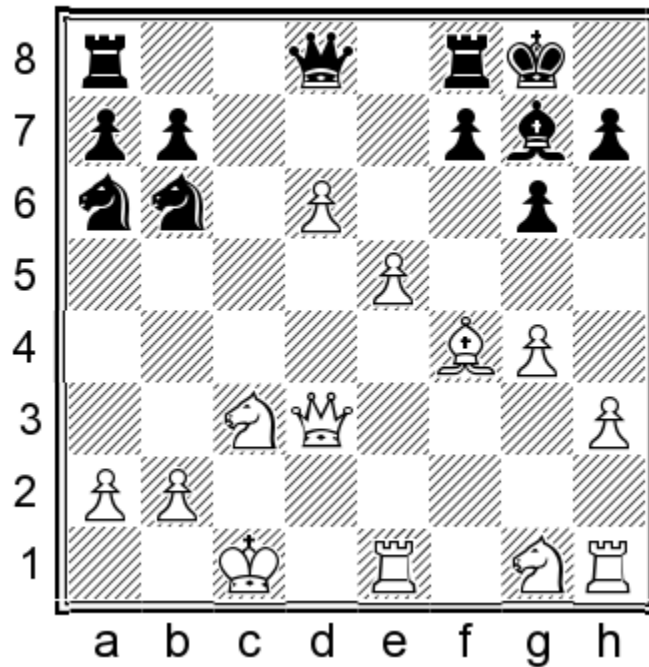
12...Re8

Trying to lure the enemy rook to e1. Here you have a brief overview of the inferior alternatives.

A) 12...c4 13.h3 N8d7 14.Nf3± Koch, J (2455) – Hauchard, A (2435) Montpellier 1991.

B) 12...Na6 13.h3! Bd7 14.Nf3 Na4 15.Nxa4 Bxa4 16.b3 Bd7 17.Bh6± Gomez Esteban, J (2450) – Seret, J (2450) Pamplona 1993.

C) 12...Bg4 13.Re1 c4 14.h3 Bf5 15.g4 Bd3 16.Bxd3 cxd3 17.Qxd3 [not 17.Re4? Na6³ Murey, J (2487) – Grunberg, M (2419) Sautron 2002]
17...Na6 18.d6±



Position after: 18.d6±

Note that White usually spends a tempo on h2-h3 in order to avoid Nf3 ...Bg4, as I already mentioned at the very start of the line. With 12...Bg4 Black anticipated the rook-pawn move, but that cost him a tempo compared to lines from 13.Re1 that we will see.

13.Bg5

13.Re1 Na6 14.Nf3 Bf5 15.Bg5 [15.Rg1 c4 16.g4 Bd3 17.Bxd3 cxd3 18.d6 Nc5∞] 15...Qc8 Black plans to follow up with the thematic idea of ...c5-c4.

13...Qc7



Position after: 13...Qc7

14.Bb5

14.d6 Qd7 15.Bb5 Nc6 16.Nf3 This line needs to be explored as well.

14...Bd7 15.Nf3 a6 16.d6 Qc8 17.Bxd7 N8xd7 18.Nd5

18.Rhe1 Bxe5

18...Nxd5 19.Qxd5 Re6



Position after: 19...Re6

We have followed Necula, I (2367) – Reichert, T (2333) ICCF email 2012, which ended peacefully. It is always a good sign for the viability of a variation when Black holds his own in correspondence games of a certain level.

My conclusion on the rare line 5...dxe5 6.fxe5 c5 7.d5 g6 is that decent preparation would provide you with excellent winning chances as Black, given the complexity of the position and despite the fact that White may objectively stand better.

b) 5...dxe5 6.fxe5 g6 7.Nc3 Bg7 8.--

1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.c4 Nb6 5.f4 dxe5 6.fxe5 g6



Position after: 6...g6

This sideline has been employed fewer than 200 times out of almost 7000 games that reached the position after 6.fxe5. It can certainly achieve a decent score in view of its surprise effect combined with a rather sensible strategy, where Black will generate play with a timely ...c7-c5.

7.Nc3

7.Nf3?! is inaccurate because it allows the knight to be pinned by a subsequent ...Bc8-g4, once the pair of moves ...c7-c5 and d4-d5 has been inserted. As a consequence, the “surrounded” e5-pawn is more likely to fall than after the correct 7.Nc3. 7...Bg7 8.Be2 0-0 9.0-0 c5 10.d5 Bg4 11.Bf4 N8d7 12.Nbd2 Qb8!



Position after: 12...Qb8!

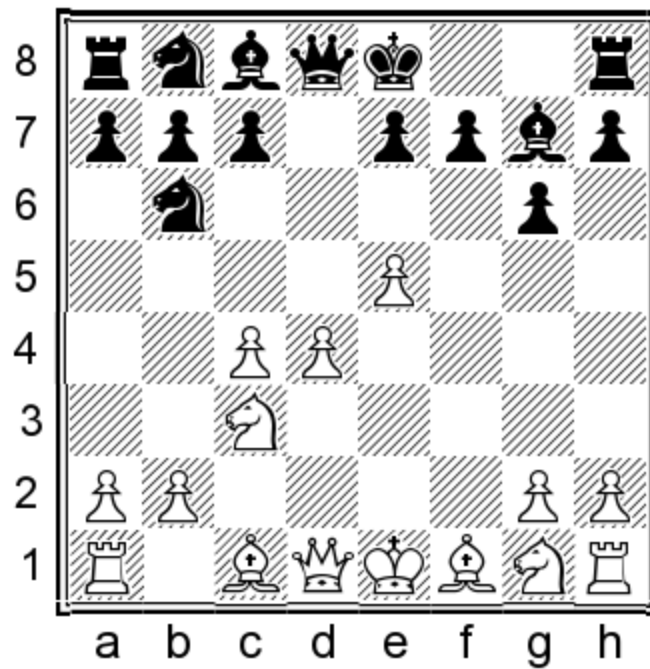
Everything is in place and though the position remains quite complex we await a triumph of the black strategy. 13.Kh1! So that after gobbling the e5-pawn Black can't unpin by swapping knights on f3 with check. [White decided to part with another pawn in Nedela, V (2375) – Velicka, P (2465) Filseck 1999, but following 13.d6?! exd6 14.exd6 Bxb2 15.Rb1 Bg7 he stood slightly worse.] 13...Bxf3 14.Nxf3 Nxe5 15.Bd3 Nbd7 16.Qe2 Qd6 17.Rae1 f6 18.h4©



Position after: 18.h4©

I am not sure how venomous White's attack on the kingside is, but if we just assume that two sets of minor pieces will be traded on e5 the arising position could be quite drawish due to the remaining opposite-colored bishops.

7...Bg7



Position after: 7...Bg7

8.Be3

A) 8.Nf3 0-0 9.Be2 c5



Position after: 9...c5

10.dxc5 Black is by now assured of taking revenge on e5, but has to choose whether he wants to keep queens on or not. [10.d5 transposes into 7.Nf3 Bg7 and so on.] 10...Qxd1+ [10...N6d7 now 11.e6 fxe6 12.Be3 transposes into 8.Be3 c5 9.dxc5 N6d7 and so on, which looks stronger than 11.Bg5?! Nc6 12.0-0 Ndx e5³ Borsavolgyi, T (2285) – Forgacs, J (2330) Debrecen 1993.] 11.Kxd1 N6d7



Position after: 11...N6d7

12.Nd5 [12.Bf4 Nc6∞ Fischer, S – Velicka, P (2450) Filseck 2001]
 12...Nc6 13.Bg5 Ndxe5 14.Bxe7 Nxe7 15.Nxe7+ Kh8 16.Nxc8 Rfxc8
 17.Nxe5 Bxe5 18.Kc2 Rxc5=

B) 8.Be2?! is inaccurate due to 8...c5. 9.d5



Position after: 9.d5

B1) Black shouldn't rush with 9...Bxe5? because of 10.Bh6!, as occurred in Shirov, A (2705) – Ritscher, J (2284) Hamburg (simultaneous) 2005. Then 10...e6 11.Nf3 Bxc3+ 12.bxc3 provided White with tremendous compensation for the missing pawn(s).

B2) Instead 9...N8d7! already turns out favorably for Black after 10.e6 fxe6 11.dxe6 Ne5 or 10.Nf3 Nxe5 11.Nxe5 Bxe5 12.Bh6 e6; compared to 9...Bxe5, one pair of knights has been exchanged and White can't parry the threat of ...Qh4+ with Ng1-f3, which makes a huge difference.

8...0-0

8...c5 9.dxc5 N6d7 This order of moves could lead to the same consequences as after 8...0-0 9.Nf3 c5 10.dxc5 [(8...c5 9.dxc5) 9...Qxd1+?! 10.Rxd1 N6d7 11.Nb5 Na6 12.e6! with the idea of 12...fxe6 13.b4 or 12...Ne5 13.exf7+ Kxf7 14.Nh3 Mujagic, R (2340) – Neckar, L (2380) Prague 1982, gives White a sizeable edge].



Position after: 8...0-0

9.Nf3

The aggressive push 9.h4!? leads to sharp and nebulous play. The most judicious way to meet this flank action should be the straightforward central counter-attack ...c5, but a bishop's dance also makes sense. Some examples follow.

A) 9...Be6 10.d5 Bc8 11.Nf3 Bg4 Black has invested time to lure the enemy pawns forward, in true Alekhine style [11...e6 12.Bg5, Narciso Dublan, M (2240) – Gil Gonzalez, J (2375) Barcelona 1992]. 12.Qd4 [or 12.Be2∞]

B) 9...c5 10.dxc5 N6d7 11.e6∞



Position after: 11.e6∞

The promised chaos arises after 11...fxe6 12.h5 and now either 12...Ne5 or 12...Qc7 13.hxg6 Qg3+ [13...hxg6!?!] 14.Kd2.

9...c5

9...Be6!?!/?!

A) Advancing 10.d5 accelerates the black counterplay. 10...Bg4 11.Qd4 Bxf3 12.gxf3 N8d7 [Black may also include 12...c5 13.Qe4 and then go for the same follow-up] 13.f4 f6 14.e6 f5 15.Qd2 Nf6 16.0-0-0 c6∞

B) 10.Qb3! a5 11.a4 Na6 12.Rd1 Nb4 13.Be2 Bf5 14.Rd2



Position after: 14.Rd2

White has conceded his opponent a nice outpost at b4, but he seems to have things under control. This means his strong center yields him a pleasant edge.

10.dxc5

10.d5?! is worse: 10...Bg4 11.h3 Bxf3 12.Qxf3 N8d7³ Brazdil, R (2180) – Velicka, P (2440) Rymarov 1999

10...N6d7



Position after: 10...N6d7

11.e6!

On the misguided 11.Qd5?! Nc6!³ [rather than 11...Nxe5?! 12.Nxe5 Qxd5 13.Nxd5 Bxe5 14.Nxe7+² Atlas, V (2455) – Mueller, R (2370) Germany 1998] Black already enjoys a slight ascendancy since after 12.e6 fxe6 13.Qxe6+?! Kh8 a discovery by the d7-knight is threatened, as well as 14...Qa5.

11...fxe6 12.Be2



Position after: 12.Be2

12...Na6

This occurred in Honfi, K – Tomaszewski, R Kecskemet 1979, when instead of the game continuation, 12...Nf6, or the risky 12...Qa5 13.0-0 Bxc3 14.bxc3 Qxc3 played in Lacasa Diaz, J – Narciso Dublan, M Barcelona 1994 could have been a tad better.

13.0-0

13.c6!?

13...Ndxc5 14.Qe1©



Position after: 14.Qe1©

Further investigations are needed to come to a final conclusion but one thing is for sure: Black gets a lively fight!

c) 5...dxe5 6.fxe5 g6 7.Nc3 Bg7 8.c5

1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.c4 Nb6 5.f4 dxe5 6.fxe5 g6 7.Nc3 Bg7 8.c5



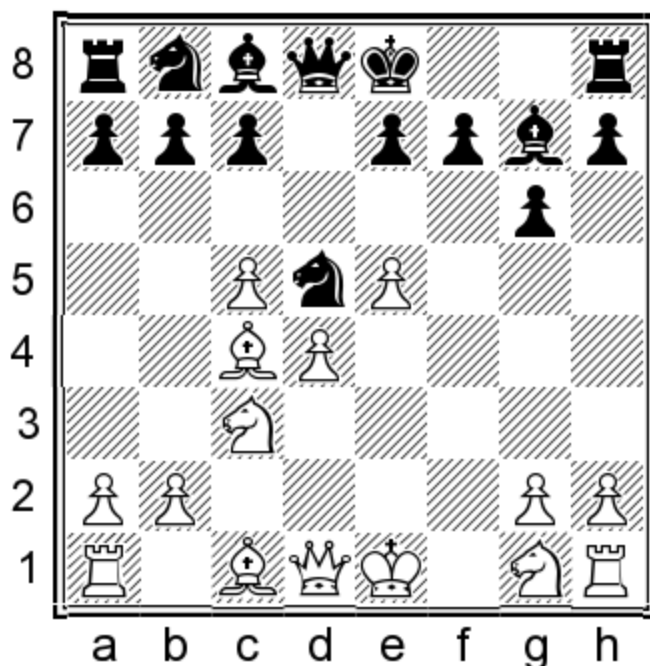
Position after: 8.c5

Stopping any ...c7-c5 ideas and enabling the bishop to venture out to c4 seems a safe way to angle for an enduring edge. Apart from this and replying d4-d5, White can also decide to meet the thematic ...c7-c5 push with dxc5. For that purpose he should go either 8.Nf3 or 8.Be3. These moves have been covered in the previous subchapter.

8...Nd5

8...N6d7? is misguided and could well lead to Black totally lacking counterplay and suffocating.

9.Bc4



Position after: 9.Bc4

9...Nxc3

Protecting the knight by means of 9...c6?! looks wrong, and in fact it is.
10.Qb3 0-0 [10...e6 comes to the same thing] 11.Nf3



Position after: 11.Nf3

A) 11...a5?! 12.0-0 Be6?! This happened in Shabalov, A – Chekhov, V Tashkent 1987, when White could have secured a large plus with 13.Qxb7 [or 13.Ng5].

B) 11...e6 12.0-0 b6



Position after: 12...b6

This is the critical position after 9...c6. Black needs to act urgently before Ne4 followed by Bg5 smashes him, but maybe it is already too late... At any rate, White now has the luxury of two promising continuations:
13.Bg5 [13.Qa3 bxc5 14.Bg5 Qb6 15.dxc5 Qc7 16.Ne4 Nd7 17.Bxd5 exd5 18.Nf6+ Kh8 19.Rae1 with 20.Qe3 coming next, White has a powerful attack] 13...Qc7



Position after: 13...Qc7

B1) Taking first with 14.cxb6 seems to rather benefit Black, but his position remains delicate. 14...axb6 15.Ne4 Ba6



Position after: 15...Ba6

16.Bxd5!? This dangerous exchange-sacrifice, played in Zude, A (2430) – Majer, D (2285) Hofheim 1995, may not be as good as a more positional approach, like 16.Bxa6 or 16.Rfc1, but it is quite scary for Black. 16...Bxf1 [White has an edge after 16...exd5 17.Nf6+ Bxf6 18.Bxf6 Nd7 19.Rf2. On the straightforward 19.Qe3 Black would save himself with 19...Nxf6 20.exf6 Qd6 21.Ne5 Bxf1 22.Rxf1 Rfe8 23.Qh6 Qf8, but after 19.Rf2 White has the strong threats of Ng5 and Qe3-h6.] 17.Nf6+ Kh8 18.Rxf1



Position after: 18.Rxf1

18...exd5? [18...cxd5! seems to hold: 19.a3 Nd7 20.Qe3©] At this stage 19.Nh4 followed by 20.Qh3 remained quite perilous for Black, who indeed had to resign six moves later, but the unexpected 19.e6!!+– would have finished the job nicely; White stops ...Nd7 and prepares both Ne5 and e6-e7 ...Qxe7 Nxh7.

B2) 14.Ne4 This happened in Spassky, B (2560) – Graf, J (2425) Germany 1990, which continued 14...Ba6 [14...Nd7 could be an improvement, when it isn't clear how much worse Black is after 15.Bxd5 exd5 16.Nf6+ Bxf6] 15.Bxd5 [White could also bet on his space advantage rather than on a wild assault, by means of 15.Bxa6!? Nxa6 16.Qa4] 15...Bxf1



Position after: 15...Bxf1

16.Bxe6?! [the engine claims that the right way to proceed consisted in 16.Nf6+!, when Black can't afford to trade on f6 but stands clearly worse after 16...Kh8 17.Bxe6] 16...Be2² and Black somehow managed to eventually survive in the afore-mentioned game.

10.bxc3 0-0 11.Nf3



Position after: 11.Nf3

11...Nc6

A) 11...b6? Is erroneous and can be refuted by direct play. 12.Ng5! Bb7

A1) 13.0-0 Bd5 14.Qb3! [much less effective was 14.Bxd5?! Qxd5 Rigo, J (2365) – Andruet, G (2365) Wuppertal 1986] 14...c6 This Isn't brilliant for Black, but still not as bad as the 13.Qb3 variation below.

A2) 13.Qb3! e6 14.0-0 Bd5 15.Bxd5 Qxd5 16.Ba3± and White is soon going to win some material.

B) 11...Bg4 12.0-0 Nc6 13.h3 Bxf3 14.Qxf3



Position after: 14.Qxf3

Pavlovic, M (2500) – Oberhofer, M (2225) Bad Woerishofen 2002 proved clearly better for White, Black's main problem being that 14...Nxd4 doesn't quite work on account of 15.Bxf7+ Kh8 16.cxd4 Rxf7 17.Qxf7 Qxd4+ 18.Be3! Qxe3+ 19.Kh1±.

12.0-0 Na5 13.Bd3



Position after: 13.Bd3

13...b6

13...f6 also demands to be explored more deeply. Some sample lines follow.

A) 14.exf6 exf6 Now if 15.h4 Black can reply ...Bg4 (15...Bg4), while after 15.Qa4 b6 16.Bf4 Bd7 the outcome remains open too.

B) 14.Re1 b6 was the theme of another correspondence game, namely Polsterer, H (2442) – Krecak, Z (2431) ICCF corr 2000, where Black also held the draw. This means perhaps that putting some effort of preparation into the 6...g6 and 9...Nxc3 line could earn you decent results in practice.

C) 14.Bf4 b6 15.Qa4 Be6 [15...Bd7!?] 16.Rae1 Bd5



Position after: 16...Bd5

Hjort, B (2510) – Tsoukkerman, B (2447) ICCF corr 1999. Black certainly can't claim equality here, but despite the engine's enthusiasm for White's prospects, it may not be more than a slight plus for White.

14.Qe1

14.cxb6?! axb6 ∞

14...bxc5 15.Ba3

Or 15.Qh4 cxd4 16.cxd4 Rb8, when in response to 17.Bh6 Black has 17...f6 ∞ available.

15...cxd4 16.cxd4 Bb7 17.Qh4 f6 18.Bb4 c5 19.Bxc5 Rc8 $\infty/2$



Position after: 19...Rc8 ∞

All in all 5...dxe5 6.fxe5 g6 probably deserves more scrutiny, nothing traumatic for Black being apparent in my opinion.



(back to the text) This quite tense position is reminiscent of the Four Pawns King's Indian, 1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 g6 3.Nc3 Bg7 4.e4 d6 5.f4 0-0 6.Nf3 c5 7.d5 e6 8.Be2 exd5 9.cxd5 and so on.

d) 5...g6 6.Nc3 Bg7 7.Be3 --

1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.c4 Nb6 5.f4 g6



Position after: 5...g6

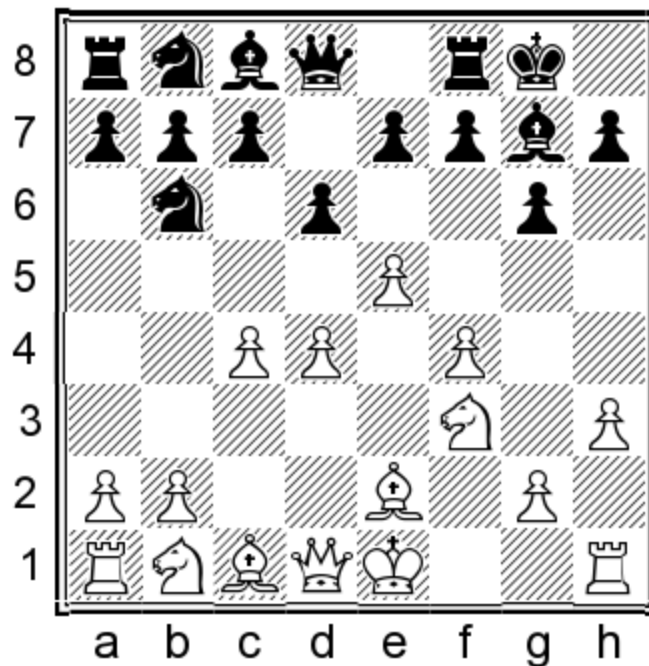
If Black wants to fianchetto his dark-squared bishop, then refraining from the early 5...dxe5 seems more judicious, though the sharp lines we have examined in the previous section are far from one-sided. As in those lines, White should in turn delay the natural Ng1-f3 in order to deny his opponent the option of ...Bc8-g4 and thus restrict his means of counterplay. I will point out times when transpositions to the 5...dxe5 6.fxe5 g6 line arise. Forgive me if I forgot some, since many different move orders are possible to reach a given position.

6.Nc3

White has naturally tried other moves as well, but they have failed to create any real problems for Black.

A) Starting with 6.Be3 doesn't make much difference, the first critical position appearing after 6...Bg7 7.Nc3.

B) After the slow 6.h3?! or the hyper-aggressive 6.h4?!, played in Asensio Linan, T (2250) – Narciso Dublan, M (2532) Montcada 2011, Black can just follow up in the same vein as 5...dxe5 6.fxe5 c5 7.d5 g6, of which he has a better version. (6.h3?!) 6...Bg7 7.Nf3 0-0 8.Be2



Position after: 8.Be2

This occurred in Mrva, V (2305) – Sergeev, V (2435) Bardejov 1996, where Black chose a common move for the 5...g6 line, namely 8...Be6!?. He could also have gone for 8...dxe5 9.fxe5 c5 10.d5 N8d7 11.Bf4 Qc7



Position after: 11...Qc7

Now 12.d6 exd6 13.exd6 Qc6 is murky whereas after 12.0-0 Nxe5 13.Kh1 Nbd7 White has some compensation because Black lags in development, but I'd still rather take his side!

C) 6.Nf3 Bg7 7.Be2 0-0 [7...dxe5 could be smarter, to dissuade White from 8.dxe5 which is available if Black waits one more move to swap on e5 8.fxe5 c5 9.d5.] 8.0-0 Be6



Position after: 8...Be6

C1) 9.Qb3!² Arzumanian, G (2504) – Shpagin, V (2369) Kharkov 2009. Here Black didn't manage to provoke the advance d4-d5, which means he may have to suffer from his spatial disadvantage.

C2) 9.b3?! is less accurate since Black gains counterplay after either 9...c5! 10.dxc5 dxe5!, Khakimov, T (2227) – Kosikov, A (2431) Kiev 2004 [Or 10.Bb2 cxd4 11.Nxd4 Nc6 12.Nxe6 fxe6 13.Bg4 Grover, S (2475) – Abhishek, K (2300) Dubai 2014. Now rather than 13...dxe5? 14.c5!, with a clear white plus, 13...Kh8! was around equal. 14.Bxe6 dxe5 15.c5? Nd4!μ].



Position after: 6.Nc3

6...Bg7

If 6...dxe5 7.fxe5 then 7...Bg7 8.c5! transposes into 5...dxe5 6.fxe5 g6 7.Nc3 Bg7 8.c5 covered earlier on, for which theoretical verdict is ², while the same goes for 7...c5 and the section on 5...dxe5 6.fxe5 c5 7.d5 Bg7.

7.Be3!

This is the most precise move order, ruling out some black options in comparison with 7.Nf3, notably the pin by ...Bg4, preceded or not by ...Bc8-e6. Another point of starting with the bishop move is that White often threatens c4-c5, and if the queens get swapped after ...dxc5 dxc5 ...Qxd1+, then the desirable recapture Rxd1 will be available. This is equally true if Black himself initiates the trade of queens by taking on e5. The ensuing endgames are in general in White's favor because of his space advantage and the dark-squared bishop shut in on g7.

In the event of 7.Nf3 Black can try 7...Be6 but the usual 7...dxe5, intending 8.fxe5 c5, gives Black an improved version of what he normally gets.

7...0-0?!

A) The catastrophic 7...f6? Has been tried only once, in Buecker, P (2280) – Westerinen, H (2420) Germany 1985, and resulted in a debacle. White chose 8.exd6 back then, and stood much better, but even stronger was 8.c5!



Position after: 8.c5!

and now 8...N6d7 9.e6 Nf8 10.d5 is pretty depressing for Black, not to mention dead lost [8...dxc5 9.dxc5 Qxd1+ 10.Rxd1 N6d7 11.Nd5 is equally horrible for Black].

B) In the event of 7...Bf5?!, played in Varley, P (2210) – Markov, J (2390) Newport 1998, White can already execute the desirable c4-c5, but 8.Nf3



Position after: 8.Nf3

was equally good and would have led after 8...0-0 9.c5 Nc8 10.Qb3 b6 to a large advantage had White here opted for 11.Rd1!.

C) 7...dxe5 8.dxe5²



Position after: 8.dxe5²

As mentioned earlier, White enjoys here a risk-free enduring plus in view of his space advantage, the silly bishop g7 and the looming c4-c5 push. Here are some practical examples to illustrate that.

C1) 8...0-0?! 9.c5!

C2) 8...Be6!? 9.Qxd8+ Kxd8 Now 10.b3 f6 is quite natural, White being for choice after either 11.exf6 or 11.Nf3, but the computer claims that even 10.Nf3!? keeps the edge.



Position after: 10.Nf3!?

The idea is that 10...Nxc4 11.Bf2 threatens Ng5 or Nd4 [while 10...Bxc4 11.Bxb6 Bxf1 12.Bxc7+ Kxc7 13.Rxf1 doesn't bring Black as much relief as one might expect: the jumps Nd5+ and Ng5 are in the air and White may also try to harass the rival king with Ke2 followed by Rac1 and Rfd1].

C3) 8...Qxd1+ 9.Rxd1 Be6 [9...Bg4 10.Rd2² Gauche, C (2289) – Lima, D (2519) Imperatriz 2003] 10.b3



Position after: 10.b3

At this crossroads two encounters diverge. In the older one Black prevented the annoying c4-c5 but landed in a passive position, while in the second one he couldn't cope tactically. 10...f6 [10...c6 11.Nf3 Na6 12.Be2 0-0 13.0-0 Rad8 14.Ng5 Nc7 15.Nce4± Munoz Pantoja, M – Castillo, P Barcelona 2002] 11.c5! N6d7 [11...Nc8? Is even worse because of the same problem: 12.Nb5 Na6 13.c6 bxc6 14.Nd4 Bd5 15.Bxa6 Bxg2 16.Bb7+–] 12.Nb5 Na6



Position after: 12...Na6

13.c6! bxc6 14.Nd4± Cheparinov, I (2555) – Grunberg, M (2401) Antalya 2004.

Let's go back to 7...0-0.



Position after: 7...0-0?!

8.c5

This is best, and we will therefore skip the study of all other sensible white moves, such as 8.Be2, 8.Nf3 or 8.h4. After 8.c5 White has gained a sizeable plus and his opponent must choose between two evils: exchanging queens and facing a grim task in the endgame, or running the risk of getting mated in order to keep things more complicated.

8...N6d7

White can hardly go wrong here provided he acts quickly enough.

8...dxc5 9.dxc5 N6d7 10.h4 c6 11.h5 Qa5 12.a3 Rd8



Position after: 12...Rd8

This position was reached in Rogers, I (2515) – Depasquale, C (2245) Toowoomba 1986. Now White let a big part of his edge vanish by trading queens with 13.Qa4?!, instead of opting for 13.Qc1!. True, the queen doesn't do much for the moment on c1, but Black still has to fear a subsequent kingside attack. White will just develop then, with Nf3, Be2 and Kf2, while b2-b4 may also come into the equation. There is of course a remote risk that he becomes over-extended, but one must be quite pessimistic to really care about that right now!



Position after: 8...N6d7

9.Nf3

A) 9.Bc4

A1) 9...b6 10.Qf3 [another quite good line was 10.cxd6 exd6 11.Nf3]
10...c6 11.cxd6 exd6 12.h4 b5 13.Bb3 [13.Bxb5!?] 13...Nb6 14.h5 Nc4



Position after: 14...Nc4

We are following Sengupta, D (2539) – Neelotpal, D (2485) Kolkata 2012, where instead of 15.Nge2, the position was already ripe for 15.hxg6! fxg6 16.Nxb5 or 15...hxg6 16.Bxc4 bxc4 17.g4+–.

A2) 9...c6 10.Nf3 d5 11.Bd3 b6 12.b4 a5



Position after: 12...a5

This was Pirrot, D – Oberhofer, M Bad Worishofen 1999, when now instead of the hasty 13.b5 White would have done better keeping his spatial advantage by simply pushing his a-pawn one square forward.

B) 9.h4, going for the throat while Black is busy untangling on the queenside, is also pretty strong. This is how my own game as White vs IM Werner Hug, in the Swiss league 2001, went. I will not discuss it further, but the idea is easy and brutal: h4-h5xg6 and bring the queen to the h-file. In addition Black must take into account the typical e5-e6 that would weaken his kingside.

9...e6

On 9...b6 White can maintain his spatial dominance with 10.b4, as in Rogers, I (2575) – Loeffler, S (2410) Wijk aan Zee 1996, but I'd rather suggest something more aggressive like 10.cxd6 cxd6



Position after: 10...cxd6

11.h4! Fernandez Garcia, J (2490) – Korneev, O (2565) Elgoibar 1996 [or 11.Bc4 Koziak, V (2483) – Oliwa, M (2408) Zielona Gora 2006; it's a matter of taste, but the white position is extremely solid in the center so an attack the enemy king is well-founded].

10.h4 dxc5 11.dxc5 Qe7 12.Qc2±



Position after: 12.Qc2±

We are following the game Orev, P (2310) – Angelov, A (2290), played in Bankia 1991.

12...Nxc5 13.h5,

The loss of the c-pawn doesn't really matter. White will open the h-file, shift his queen there and most likely deliver mate!

e) 5...g6 6.Nc3 Bg7 7.Be3 Be6 8.--

1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.c4 Nb6 5.f4 g6 6.Nc3 Bg7 7.Be3! Be6!



Position after: 7...Be6!

This bishop move, which aims to incite the d4-d5 push in the spirit of this opening, revitalizes the whole variation from the black perspective. For the moment Black isn't threatening to take on c4, in view of the possibility Qa4+, but once he has castled White will have to take some measures. In addition, if White goes c4-c5 the black knight could jump to d5 rather than d7, and Black could consider going for the structure that arises after ...dxe5 dxe5. Then ...Nc6 followed by ...f7-f6 would give him a much better version than after 7...dxe5?! and be effectively quite satisfactory for him. But why is Black ready to lose time in order to provoke d4-d5? The reason is simple: for the time being the white center is "too strong" so that Black lacks adequate means of generating counterplay. After the d4-d5 push the e5-pawn will be softened and Black's pressure on it will be more effective. Furthermore, ...c7-c6, undermining the d5-pawn, could also come.

8.d5

This is White's most frequent reaction, but not necessarily the best one.

A) 8.Qb3?!



Position after: 8.Qb3?!

This move, right now superfluous, enables White to follow up with Rd1. Practice has shown, however, that it isn't the most testing try. 8...a5! 9.a4 [One way or another White must make a concession, whether he allows ...a5-a4 or blocks the a-pawn advance like this or with 9.Na4.] 9...Na6 10.Rd1 Nb4 Now that this horse has reached its ideal outpost, ...d6-d5 and/or ...Be6-f5 will be awkward to meet for White. 11.Nf3 d5 [11...0-0!? also deserved consideration, intending 12.Be2 Bf5 13.Rd2 d5,,.]



Position after: 11...d5

12.c5 [12.cxd5?! N4xd5 13.Nxd5 Bxd5 followed by 14...Bxf3, was seen in Kotek, D (2315) – Sergeev, V (2465) Czech Republic 1997, where Black had a pleasant positional edge.] 12...Nc4 13.Bc1∞ Black is fine here too, but the game is much more complicated strategically than after 12.cxd5?!.

B) 8.b3!?



Position after: 8.b3!?

This quiet-looking move represents a serious attempt at extracting an opening advantage, for which purpose White must be ready to sacrifice his e5-pawn in some lines.

B1) 8...0-0 9.Qd2 c5 10.dxc5 N6d7 11.cxd6 exd6 12.Qxd6



Position after: 12.Qxd6

Fercec, N (2466) – Kostrun, S (2204) Pula 2002. Black didn't have quite enough compensation for his pawns but after 12...Nc6 the white side isn't easy to handle in a practical game. Note that in the variation starting with 8.Nf3 0-0 9.b3 White reaches the position in the diagram a tempo down (Qd1-d2 then Qd2xd6) which proves in the current case advantageous for him! Indeed, the trick 12...Nxe5?? falls short here since Black can't swap a white knight on f3. 13.Qxd8 Nf3+ 14.Nxf3 Bxc3+ 15.Qd2+- **B2)** 8...dxe5 9.fxe5 [less ambitious is 9.dxe5 Nc6, which doesn't trouble Black at all] 9...c5 10.d5 Bf5 [10...Bxe5 11.Qd2©] 11.Be2 Bxe5 12.Qd2 N8d7 13.Rd1



Position after: 13.Rd1

Now 13...h5 14.Nf3 was Binas, J (2450) – Schmidt, L (2408) ICCF email 2018, where the weakened black kingside means White has compensation for his pawn, and the same goes for 13...0-0 14.g4 Bxc3 15.Qxc3 Be4 16.Nf3©.

C) 8.h4



Position after: 8.h4

Black can now ignore White's aggressive push, which is obviously risky for him, or else stop the h-pawn's advance.

C1) 8...h5 9.Nh3!? [9.Nf3 0-0 10.Qb3 a5 11.Ng5 a4 – see 8.Nf3 for the same position without the insertion of h2-h4/...h7-h5, which looks neutral for the assessment.] 9...c6 [In the event of 9...dxe5 10.dxe5 Qxd1+ 11.Rxd1 Nxc4 12.Bf2© White has very decent compensation for one little pawn, his immediate threat being 13.Ng5.]



Position after: 9...c6

Now rather than 10.Ng5?! Polivanov, A (2394) – Sergeev, V (2448)
Lutsk (rapid) 2015, White could have secured an edge thanks to 10.Qb3!.

C2) 8...Nxc4!? 9.Bxc4 [9.Qa4+? b5! Is simply bad for White.] 9...Bxc4
10.Qa4+ b5 11.Nxb5 Bxb5 12.Qxb5+ c6 13.Qb7 Nd7 $\infty/2$



Position after: 13...Nd7 ∞

With two sets of minor pieces swapped Black shouldn't be too afraid of a white offensive on the kingside, especially with the white queen far away, the knight still on g1 and the semi-open b-file.

C3) 8...0-0 9.d5



Position after: 9.d5

Now after either 9...Bc8 or 9...Bf5, provoking further pawn pushes, Black will certainly get counterplay but his king also runs a genuine risk of getting slaughtered after, for instance, 10.g4 Bc8 11.h5 dxe5 ∞ .

D) With the rook move 8.Rc1 White (over)protects his knight, anticipating the later sequence b2-b3 ...c5 dxc5 ...N6d7, when his e-pawn wouldn't be pinned.



Position after: 8.Rc1

Black, however, can employ his usual tools to get adequate counterplay:
8...0-0 9.b3 dxe5 10.fxe5 [or 10.dxe5 Nc6= with ...f7-f6 to follow] 10...c5
11.d5 Bc8 12.Nf3 Bg4 13.Bxc5 N8d7 14.Be3 Nxe5 with equality,
Soumya, S (2384) – Crevatin, L (2258) Stockholm 2020.

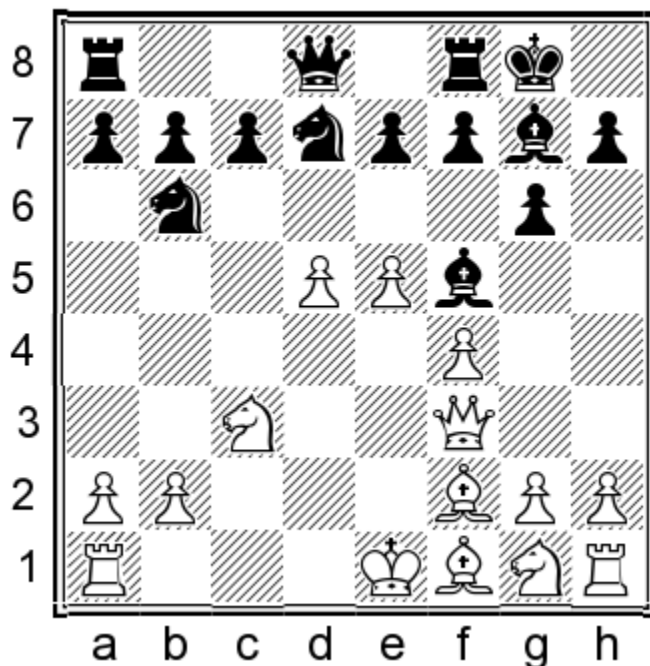


Position after: 8.d5

8...Bc8

Now retreating the bishop is the safest and possibly best approach, but 8...Bf5!? deserves serious consideration too.

A) 9.c5 dxc5 [9...N6d7?? 10.g4+–] 10.Bxc5 0-0 11.Qf3 [11.Nf3 is playable too] 11...N8d7 12.Bf2



Position after: 12.Bf2

12...g5! 13.g4 After this move the game Moser, E (2433) – Fier, A (2595) Vienna 2013 took on a forced character and was a well-played draw.

Enjoy! 13...Bg6 14.f5 Nxe5 15.Qe4 e6 16.fxg6 fxg6 17.Bxb6 axb6 18.0-0-0 exd5



Position after: 18...exd5

A1) 19.Qxd5+ Qxd5 20.Nxd5 Rxa2 21.Kb1 Rfa8 22.Nxc7 Nd3 23.Rd2 Ra1+ 24.Kc2 R8a2 25.Nf3 Nxb2 26.Rd8+ Kf7 27.Rd7+ Kg8 28.Rd8+

Kf7 29.Rd7+ Kg8 and a draw was agreed.

A2) The alternative 19.Nxd5 was optically much riskier for White:
19...Rxa2 20.Ne7+ Qxe7 21.Bc4+ Kh8 [astonishing as it seems, Black
may also be OK after 21...Nxc4 22.Qxe7 b5, where he aims at repeating
moves by means of ...Bxb2+ Kb1 ...Ra1+ Kc2 ...Ra2 and so on] 22.Bxa2
Qf6.



Position after: 22...Qf6

Black has three pawns for the rook and serious threats on the long
diagonal. He should be doing alright.

B) 9.Nf3 0-0 10.Be2



Position after: 10.Be2

10...Bg4 [10...N8d7 11.0-0 dxe5 12.c5 exf4 13.Bd4 Nc8 14.Bxg7 Kxg7
15.Qd4+ White enjoys more than enough compensation, according to the
engine] 11.c5 N6d7 [the mistake 11...Bxf3? 12.Bxf3 Nc4 13.Bf2± left
Black embarrassed in Kucza, K (2278) – Sergeev, V (2446) Gorzow
Wielkopolski 2017] 12.e6 [12.0-0!?] 12...Bxf3 13.Bxf3 Nxc5 14.exf7+
Rxf7



Position after: 14...Rxf7

Lebedev, V (2385) – Wilhelmi, D (2478) ICCF email 2010. Whether he
launches a fierce attack with 15.h4, as in that game, or plays in a more
positional fashion by choosing 15.0-0!? White retains adequate
compensation.

After 8...Bc8 we are at an important crossroads.



Position after: 8...Bc8

9.Nf3!

A) 9.exd6?! exd6 10.Bd4 0-0 11.Bxg7 Kxg7 12.Ne4? [12.Qd4+=]
12...Re8 13.Qd4+ f6 Black was clearly on top in Vedder, R (2277) –
Taddei, B (2348) Vlissingen 2014.

B) 9.c5 N6d7



Position after: 9...N6d7

B1) The dubious pawn-sacrifice 10.c6?! from Devereaux, M (2374) –
Lie, E (2459) Norway 2018 should have been accepted! Rather than
10...Nb6?! as played, 10...bxc6 11.dxc6 Nxc6 12.Bb5 and now either
12...Na5 or 12...Bb7 would have been better for Black.

B2) 10.cxd6

B2.1) 10...cxd6 11.exd6 and now 11...0-0 is an interesting suggestion of
Lakdawala in *The Alekhine Defence*, published by Everyman Chess in
2014.



Position after: 11...0-0

Then 12.dxe7 Qxe7 is precarious for White, while 12.Bd4 can be
countered by 12...Nf6, eluding the exchange of bishops.

B2.2) 10...exd6



Position after: 10...exd6

11.e6 [Instead 11.exd6 cxd6 12.Bd4 0-0 proved quite OK for Black in
Nevednichy, V (2531) – Spyropoulos, N (2404) Paleochoira 2019; the

pawn at f4 has created some weaknesses in White's camp.] 11...fxe6
12.dxe6 Nf6



Position after: 12...Nf6

After 13.Qb3? Qe7 14.0-0-0 (or 14.Bc4 c6, followed by ...d6-d5) Qxe6 White's compensation had already fizzled out in Arribas Lopez, A (2334) – Navarro Cia, M (2318) Pamplona 2008, since by hitting the bishop on e3 Black forces a trade of queens. Instead White should have tried 13.f5! gxf5 14.Bc4 c6 15.Nf3 d5 16.Bd3 0-0 17.Bxf5 Qe7 when things are murkier than after 13.Qb3?.



Position after: 9.Nf3!

9...c6

A) 9...Bg4 virtually forces White to sacrifice a pawn, but he gets ample compensation for it in most lines.



Position after: 9...Bg4

A1) 10.Be2 Bxf3 [Undermining the d5-pawn by means of 10...c6 could be smarter.] 11.Bxf3 dxe5

A1.1) 12.c5 exf4 13.Bxf4 [On 13.Bd4 Black saves the piece with 13...e5.] 13...N6d7 14.c6 bxc6 15.Qe2©

A1.2) 12.fxe5 Bxe5 13.c5 N6d7 14.Qb3±



Position after: 14.Qb3±

Solomon, S (2397) – Teichmann, E (2388) Canterbury 2010. The computer claims that White stands much better here, which may well be true. At any rate, defending the black cause seems to be a tough task.

A2) 10.h3 Bxf3 11.Qxf3 dxe5 12.c5 [12.f5!? and 12.Rd1 also need to be checked.] 12...exf4 13.Bb5+ N6d7 14.Qxf4 0-0 15.0-0 c6 16.Bc4©



Position after: 16.Bc4©

Zvara, P (2409) – Stoczek, J (2559) Czech Republic 2009. In return for a pawn White has the two bishops and a lead in development.

B) 9...0-0

B1) 10.h4!? Bg4 [10...e6 Dastan, B (2474) – Bodirola, P (2325) Nova Gorica 2016] 11.h5 Bxh5 12.Rxh5 gxh5 13.Qc2©



Position after: 13.Qc2©

White has nice compensation for the exchange, in my opinion, 14.Ng5 being an immediate threat. Incidentally, Lakdawala examines the same position with White's pawn on b3 and his knight still on g1, which obviously tells in Black's favor. I would say, more generally, that his coverage of the whole line gives an interesting overview of Black's opening and middlegame ideas, but is a bit light from a theoretical standpoint. In some critical lines, which undoubtedly require serious preparation/knowledge from his opponent, Black could quickly land in delicate positions.

B2) 10.Bd3 [10...Bg4!?] 10...e6 This is how the game Denisov, I (2300) – Khalifman, A (2637) Aix-les-Bains 2011 continued. Numerous alternatives exist for both sides. Let's see one possible continuation.



Position after: 10...e6

11.0-0 Na6 12.Be2 exd5 13.cxd5 Bg4 14.Bd4 Nb4 15.Qb3 c5 16.dxc6 Nxc6 17.Bxb6 Qxb6+ 18.Qxb6 axb6 19.exd6 Rfd8 20.Rfd1 Bf8= Black recovers the pawn he had invested, with rough equality.

10.Be2 0-0 11.0-0



Position after: 11.0-0

We have again arrived at a crossroads, where Black has to choose between two moves that increase the pressure on the e5-pawn.

11...Bg4

Or 11...N6d7 12.exd6 exd6 13.f5 [perhaps 13.dxc6 Nxc6 14.Qxd6 Re8 15.Qd2², though with the pawn on f4 rather than f2 the white position is less stable and Black can hope for counterplay] 13...Re8 14.Qd2 Nf6 15.fxg6 hxg6 16.Ng5 Nbd7 17.h3 Ne5 18.Rf2 Qe7 19.Raf1 Bf5 20.g4 Bd7[∞] Brodt, A (2368) – Schmidt, L (2408) ICCF email 2018.

12.Qd2 Bxf3 13.Rxf3 cxd5 14.cxd5 dxe5 15.fxe5 Bxe5 16.Bh6

Again a critical position.



Position after: 16.Bh6

16...Re8

16...N8d7!? Petr, M (2416) – Sergeev, V (2455) Usti nad Orlici 2006 is an interesting exchange sacrifice, based on positional compensation thanks to Black's supremacy on the dark squares.

17.Raf1 N8d7 18.Rxf7 Nf6=

18...Bf6 19.Bg4 Ne5 20.R7xf6 exf6 21.Be6+ Rxe6 22.dxe6 Qxd2 23.Bxd2
Oren, I (2256) – Reichert, T (2352) ICCF email 2017.

**19.Rg7+ Kh8 20.Qg5 Bxc3 21.bxc3 Nbx5 22.Qe5 Rc8 23.Rf7 Nxc3
24.Bf3 Kg8**



Position after: 24...Kg8

25.Rg7+ Kh8 26.Rf7 Kg8 27.Rg7+ Kh8 28.Rf7 Kg8 29.Rg7+

½-½ Ivanovic, Z (2203) – Kreck, Z (2399) ICCF email 2006.

I went quite far in this specific variation to show that it has held in
correspondence games where the belligerents had a quite decent level.

f) 5...g6 6.Nc3 Bg7 7.Be3 Be6 8.Nf3

**1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.c4 Nb6 5.f4 g6 6.Nc3 Bg7 7.Be3! Be6! 8.Nf3
0-0**



Position after: 8...0-0

8...Nxc4?! leads to a worse version of 7.h4 Nxc4!?

9.Qb3

A) 9.c5?! Nd5 10.Nxd5 Bxd5= was at least equal for Black in the rapid
game Jones, G (2640) – Daulyte, D (2439) chess.com 2018.

B) In the event of 9.d5 Bg4



Position after: 9...Bg4

White should avoid 10.Qd2?! c6³, as in Bauer, J – Sergeev, V Sala 1993, but instead choose one of the following options.

B1) 10.h3 Bxf3 11.Qxf3 dxe5 12.0-0-0 exf4 13.Bxf4 N8d7,,

B2) 10.c5 N6d7 [10...dxc5!?] 11.h3 Bxf3 12.Qxf3 dxe5 13.Rd1 White visibly has some compensation for his pawn.

C) 9.b3

C1) 9...dxe5!? 10.dxe5 [Or 10.fxe5 when 10...c5,, is the typical reaction.] 10...Nc6



Position after: 10...Nc6

11.Ne4 Trying to bother Black a bit. [Otherwise the simple 11.Be2 f6 12.exf6 was around equal.] 11...f6 12.Nc5 Qc8 13.exf6 Bxf6 14.Be2?! [The engine opines that the more materialistic 14.Rc1 would have kept the balance after either 14...Bb2 or 14...Bf5 15.Bd3 Rd8 16.Qe2.] 14...Rd8 15.Qc1 Bf5 16.0-0 Nd7 17.Nd3 Bxa1 18.Qxa1 Nf6³



Position after: 18...Nf6³

Caruana, F – Carlsen, M, Chess24 (rapid) 2020.

C2) 9...c5! 10.dxc5?! [10.d5!∞] 10...N6d7



Position after: 10...N6d7

C2.1) 11.Rc1? dxe5μ ½-½ Fedorov, A (2620) – Sergeev, V (2430) Warsaw 2004. Black offered a draw in this much better position, likely out of respect/fear for his higher-rated opponent.

C2.2) 11.Be2?! dxe5 Vila Gazquez, X (2475) – Comas Fabrego, L (2467) Barcelona 2019.

C2.3) 11.cxd6! Relatively best in this unenviable situation. After other moves Black's edge would be more significant. 11...exd6 12.Qxd6 [12.Rc1 dxe5³ Buecker, S (2355) – Stickler, A (2265) Germany 1991] 12...Nxe5 13.Qxd8 Nxf3+ 14.gxf3 Rxd8 15.Rc1 Nc6 with full compensation.



Position after: 15...Nc6©

Stopa, J (2460) – Narciso Dublan, M (2532) Montcada 2011. Despite being a pawn down, it is Black who is the one pushing for an edge here, but White should hold this ending.

9...a5

9...Na6!?



Position after: 9...Na6!?

With the idea of covering the c5-square, thus enabling the ...c7-c5 thrust.

A) 10.Rc1 c5 11.d5 Bg4 12.Be2 Bxf3 13.Bxf3 dxe5 14.fxe5 Bxe5 15.0-0©

B) 10.Be2 c5 11.Rd1 Qc8 12.d5 [12.Nd5? Bxd5! 13.cxd5 c4 14.Qa3 Nxd5 White was left without any compensation at all for the lost pawn in Radnai, A (2327) – Sergeev, V (2446) Heviz 2015] 12...Bg4 13.0-0∞ Bxf3 14.Bxf3 dxe5 15.Nb5 White has excellent compensation for the pawn, d5-d6 and Nxa7 being in the air.



Position after: 15.Nb5

If one compares this with the 10.Rc1 variation, the insertion of the duet Rd1/...Qc8 certainly benefits White.

C) 10.Ng5 c5!



Position after: 10...c5!

11.dxc5 [Alternatives are 11.d5!? and 11.Nxe6 fxe6 12.dxc5 Nxc5,,.]
11...Nxc5 12.Bxc5 dxc5 13.Rd1 Qc8= Riff, J (2473) – Sergeev, V (2475)
Sautron 2012.

10.Ng5

10.Na4?! is artificial and following 10...Nxa4 11.Qxa4 c5! Black was in good shape, Brandenburg, D (2519) – Theulings, P (2128) Groningen 2011.



Position after: 10.Ng5

10...a4!

10...Bf5 11.c5 a4 12.Qd1 dxc5 [On 12...a3 the simplest is to avoid complications and opt for 13.b3 f6 14.Nf3±.] 13.dxc5 Qxd1+ 14.Rxd1



Position after: 14.Rxd1

This proved much better for White owing to his space advantage and the looming Nd5 in Simon, O (2338) – Degraeve, J (2573) Lille 2011.

**11.Nxe6 axb3 12.Nxd8 Rxd8 13.c5 dxc5 14.dxc5 Nd5 15.Nxd5 Rxd5
16.Bc4**

16.a3 also deserves attention.

16...Rxa2 17.Rxa2 bxa2 18.Ke2 Rd8



Position after: 18...Rd8

19.Ra1

White can also offer a quick trade of rooks but it is unclear whether that would increase his chances of success.

19.Bxa2 Nc6 20.Rd1 Rxd1 21.Kxd1 Black can now go for either 21...g5 or 21...e6, perhaps followed by ...h7-h5.

19...Nc6 20.Rxa2 e6



Position after: 20...e6

Lakdawala thinks this endgame is OK for Black, probably meaning he will hold with perfect play. I tend to agree with this judgement.

Conclusion: I quite like this approach from Black, linked with a kingside fianchetto and a delayed ...dxe5, and believe it will give you excellent chances to get a good game in practice. It is rather fresh and may come under more theoretical scrutiny after the rapid game between Caruana and Carlsen, where the World Champion emerged quite comfortably from the opening. Theory is by far less developed there than in the “official main line” for Black vs the Four Pawns, which has proven very reliable but needs much more work; see the next section. That being said, some correspondence games featuring the 8.Nf3 0-0 variation have shown an acceptable way to handle the position (for both sides) until after move 25.

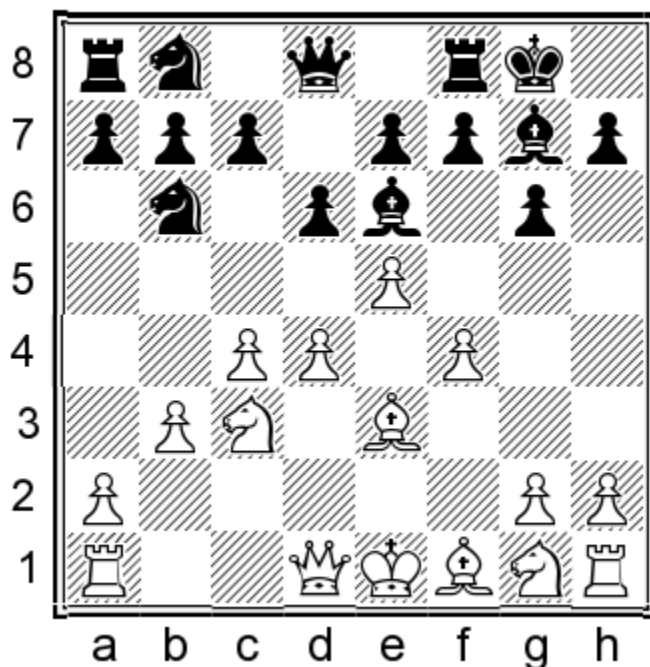
Appendix: Topalov – Bauer 2021

Topalov, Veselin (2735)

Bauer, Christian (2639)

Chalons-en-Champagne 2021

1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.c4 Nb6 5.f4 g6 6.Nc3 Bg7 7.Be3 Be6 8.b3 0-0



Position after: 8...0-0

9.Be2

9.Rc1 dxe5 10.fxe5 c5 11.d5 Bc8



Position after: 11...Bc8

A) 12.Nf3 Bg4 13.Bxc5 N8d7 [13...Bxf3! 14.Qxf3 N8d7²] 14.Be3 Nxe5 15.Be2 Nxf3+ 16.Bxf3 Bxf3 17.Qxf3 Nd7 [17...e6!?] 18.0-0± 1-0 (37)
Soumya, S (2384) – Crevatin, L (2258) Stockholm 2020

B) 12.Be2 N6d7 13.Nf3 Nxe5 14.Nxe5 [14.Bxc5²] 14...Bxe5 15.Bxc5 Qc7 16.Bd4 Bxh2 17.Qd2 Bf4 18.Be3 Bg3+ 19.Kf1©



Position after: 19.Kf1©

19...Nd7 20.Ne4 Be5 21.c5 Nf6 22.Nxf6+ Bxf6 23.Bd4 Bxd4 24.Qxd4 Qg3 25.Bf3 Bf5 26.Qh4 Qxh4 27.Rxh4 White stands better, despite the minus pawn. 27...Rac8 28.Ra4 a6 29.Kf2 Rc7 30.Rb4 Rd8 31.c6 bxc6 32.dxc6 Rd2+ 33.Ke3 Rxa2 34.Rb7 Rc8 35.c7 Kg7 36.Rb8 Rf8 37.Be4 a5 38.Bxf5 1-0 Akram, F (2230) – Wittal, W (2094) IECC email 2018

9...dxe5 10.fxe5 c5 11.d5 Bf5 12.Rc1



Position after: 12.Rc1

12...Na6

12...Bxe5!? 13.Nf3 Bd6 14.0-0 N8d7 Black's next move is 15...Nf6. 15.Bh6 [15.Qe1!?; 15.Nd2!?; 15.Nh4 e6,,] 15...Nf6 [15...Re8!?] 16.Qd2 [16.Bxf8 Qxf8©/²] 16...Qb8 [16...Re8



Position after: 16...Re8

The evaluation of this variation depends on this position.] 17.Nb5! Re8 18.Nxd6 Qxd6



Position after: 18...Qxd6

19.Nh4 [19.Ng5!?] 19...Be4 20.Rce1 Nbd7 21.g4 Rad8 22.Bd1 b5 23.g5 bxc4 24.bxc4 Bxd5 25.Nf5 gxf5 26.gxf6 Qxf6 27.cxd5 Kh8 28.Kh1 Rg8 29.Bf4 Qh4 30.Bc2 Nb6 31.d6 exd6 32.Bxf5 Qf6 33.Qd3 Qg7 34.Rg1 1-0 Abolins Abols, D (2165) – Morosi, D (2160) ICCF email 2018

13.Nf3 Nd7 14.Bf4 Qb8 15.d6 exd6 16.exd6 Nb4 17.a3 Nc6 18.0-0 Qd8
19.Nd5 Nf6 20.Bg5 h6 21.Nxf6+ Bxf6 22.Bxh6 Re8 23.Bf4 Bb2 24.Qd2
Qf6 25.Rcd1 Bc3 26.Bg5 Bxd2 27.Bxf6 Be3+ 28.Kh1 Re6 29.Bh4 Bf4
30.Bd3 Bxd3 31.Rxd3 Rxd6 32.Rd5 Rxd5 33.cxd5 Ne5 34.Nxe5 Bxe5
35.Be7 f6 36.g4 g5 37.h4 gxh4 38.g5 fxg5 39.d6 Bxd6 40.Bxd6 Rd8
41.Bxc5 b6 42.Be7 Rd3 43.Rg1 Rh3+ 44.Kg2

1/2-1/2

Chapter 4

Exchange Variation with 5...exd6

1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.c4 Nb6 5.exd6 exd6

Chapter Guide

Chapter 4 – Exchange Variation with 5...exd6

1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.c4 Nb6 5.exd6 exd6

a) 6.Nc3 Bf5, 6...g6

b) 6.Nc3 Nc6 7.Be3

c) 6.Nc3 Nc6 7.d5

d) 6.Nc3 Be7 7.Be3

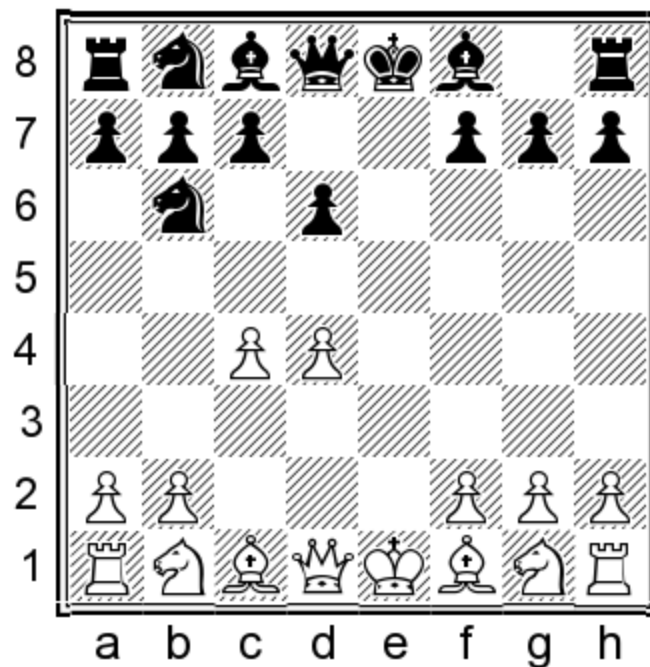
e) 6.Nc3 Be7 7.Bd3

f) 6.Nf3 Be7 7.Bd3

g) 6.Nf3 Be7 7.Be2

a) 6.Nc3 Bf5, 6...g6

1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.c4 Nb6 5.exd6 exd6



Position after: 5...exd6

The recapture 5...exd6 leads to less imbalance than 5...cxd6, which I personally prefer although I have tried both. Basically White has to choose between two setups: 1) Nc3/Bd3/ Nge2, probably in this order and 2) Nf3/Be2/Nc3, again most likely in this order. White might also go for some hyper-aggressive construction, based on Nc3/Be3/Qf3 and 0-0-0, but this is rather dubious and would at any rate give Black good opportunities to get counterplay. While in 1) White will always castle short, there are a few cases when he could consider castling long in 2). Indeed, if Black goes for early kingside castling himself and provides his opponent with targets, namely plays a quick ...Bg4 h3 ...Bh5 and ...Be7-f6, White would gain valuable time to launch a kingside offensive and open files with a further g4 ...Bg6 h4 and so on.

Black, in turn, disposes of various piece arrangements, the most common involving ...Be7, ...Nc6 and ...Bg4, having in mind a timely ...d6-d5. While putting his dark-squared bishop on e7 almost seems to be a must, Black can try other setups linked with ...c7-c6 and ...Na6-c7 or else a quick ...c7-c5, before ...Nb8-c6 or after ...Nb8-c6-b4. A likely development of the standard ...Nc6 followed by the push ...d6-d5 is c4-c5 ...Nb6-c8, when Black wants to achieve ...Bf6 followed by ...N8e7-f5. If he succeeds he will most of the time stand well, but must watch for g2-g4-g5 tricks that could cost him a piece. Quite often White emerges from the opening with a slight (yet from Black's standpoint quite manageable) edge due to his space advantage, whether his pawns are still on c4 and d4 or if the pawn structure has evolved to c4 and d5 vs c7 and d6 or c5 and d4 vs c6 and d5. Some move order issues already appear on move six.

6.Nc3

This is by far White's most popular choice here, used about 4500 times out of 7000. As we will see, developing that knight on d2 seems to be rarely

adopted, so 6.Nc3 should come anyway and thus represents the most flexible move here.

In the event of 6.Bd3 Black can go for a bishop hunt with 6...Nc6



Position after: 6...Nc6

followed by ...Nb4, or possibly fianchetto his dark-squared bishop, after which he shouldn't be far from full equality.

A) Now for two games where Shirov was White. 7.Ne2 g6 8.Nbc3 Bg7 9.Be3 0-0



Position after: 9...0-0

10.0-0 [Some five years later Shirov tried the hardly better 10.a3?! in a blitz game vs Vladimir Sveshnikov, Riga 2018, which continued 10...d5 11.c5 Nc4 12.Bxc4 dxc4 13.0-0 Bf5³.] 10...Nb4 11.b3 c6 [or 11...Nxd3 12.Qxd3 c6[∞]] 12.Bb1 d5 13.c5 Nd7 14.a3 Na6 15.b4 Nc7 16.Bd3 Ne6 17.Qd2 b6=



Position after: 17...b6=

Shirov, A (2718) – Appel, R (2525) Germany 2013. Black has equalized without any problem. His knight is well placed on e6, where it controls central squares and puts pressure on d4.

B) 7.Be3 Nb4 8.Be2 Keeping the bishop but after the natural 8...Bf5 9.Na3 as in Zapata, A (2515) – Miles, A (2550) Yopal 1997, the white knight was misplaced.



Position after: 9.Na3

That game continued 9...Be7 10.Nf3 d5 11.c5 Nd7 12.Qb3 a5 13.0-0 0-0 14.Rfc1 c6 15.Nb1 b5,,. I briefly checked 15...b6 but Black shouldn't have quite enough following 16.a3 bxc5 17.axb4 c4 18.Qd1 axb4 19.Nbd2.



Position after: 6.Nc3

6...g6

This rare move is not unplayable.

6...Bf5?! takes advantage of the fact that White did not play 6.Bd3, but if Black could equalize so easily life would be too simple!



Position after: 6...Bf5?!

A) 7.Bd3!? Bxd3 [I don't believe 7...Qf6?! or 7...Bg6 are any better. White would just develop, with Nf3 and 0-0, and count on a slight but enduring plus owing to his space advantage.] 8.Qxd3 Be7 9.Nf3 0-0



Position after: 9...0-0

10.h4!? This aggressive push was crowned with success in Naiditsch, A – Varga, Z, Dortmund 2000. The simple 10.0-0 c6 11.Bf4, as in Dittmar, P – Gross, L Germany 1994, could also suffice to give White slightly better chances, though Black is pretty solid there. 10...Re8 [10...Nc6!?] 11.Be3 d5 12.Ng5



Position after: 12.Ng5

Now instead of the mistaken 12...Bxg5? 13.hxg5 g6 14.0-0-0!, which gave White good attacking prospects on the kingside, Black should have

preferred 12...g6!? 13.c5 Nc4 14.0-0, which is unclear. On move 13 White could not conveniently keep his central pawn duo together since 13.b3? runs into 13...dxc4 14.bxc4 c5 15.d5 Nc6!.

B) 7.Be3 Nc6 as in Sosa, T (2466) – Valerga, D (2452) Buenos Aires 2017 was less testing.

C) 7.Qf3! I like this energetic approach, which tries to underline the defect of Black's last move. White can speed up his long castling and try to combine that with a timely c4-c5. 7...Qc8 8.Be3!



Position after: 8.Be3!

Threatening the above-mentioned c4-c5 thrust.

C1) 8...c5 We are following Asis Gargatagli, H (2395) – Kallio, H (2507) Andorra 2005, where the outcome of the opening clearly favored White. The game continued 9.dxc5 [9.Qg3!?] 9...dxc5 10.Qg3 f6 11.0-0-0 Kf7 12.Nf3 Nc6 13.Be2 Be7 14.Nh4 and White had a nice edge.



Position after: 14.Nh4

C2) 8...c6 doesn't really improve on Black's play, as the following sample line shows: 9.Qg3 Na6 10.Nf3 Nb4 11.0-0-0 Bg6 12.Nh4 Be7 13.Nxg6 Qf5. This intermediate move doesn't solve anything; its main effect is of a visual nature... 14.Rd2 hxg6



Position after: 14...hxg6

Now the sad news: Black's pieces get repelled and White remains with more space and the two bishops after 15.a3 Na6 16.Bd3±.

7.Nf3 Bg4

On 7...Bg7?! 8.Bg5! is a bit irritating.

8.h3



Position after: 8.h3

8...Qe7+!

One way or another White will stand a bit better, but 8...Bxf3 9.Qxf3 Nc6 10.Be3 Bg7 11.0-0-0 is riskier for Black; c4-c5 and h3-h4 are in the air. Black is under pressure.

9.Be3 Bxf3 10.Qxf3 Bh6!



Position after: 10...Bh6!

Black needs to gain time in order to complete his development. With this unexpected move he indirectly covers his b7-pawn.

11.0-0-0

The engine assesses 11.Qxb7?! Bxe3 12.fxe3 Qxe3+ as about equal.

11...Bxe3+ 12.fxe3 c6²



Position after: 12...c6²

Although he stands slightly worse I think Black could try this line occasionally since it isn't so obvious how White should proceed to create serious problems. After a subsequent ...Nbd7 the advance e3-e4 from White

could be answered by ...c6-c5, aiming at winning the e5-square for the black cavalry.

b) 6.Nc3 Nc6 7.Be3

1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.c4 Nb6 5.exd6 exd6 6.Nc3



Position after: 6.Nc3

6...Nc6

I see this move order, rather than 6...Be7, as an attempt to disturb the white setup Nc3/Bd3/Nge2, or at least to force an early Bc1-e3.

7.Be3

7.Nf3 Be7 8.Bd3 Bg4 9.h3 [or 9.Be3 Bf6,, Markus, R (2440) – Penzler, F (2490) email 2012] 9...Bxf3 10.Qxf3 Nxd4 11.Qxb7 Ne6



Position after: 11...Ne6

The game Steiger, W (2341) – Nettelbeck, J (2339) ICCF email 2011 reached this position, which the engine judges as about equal. Play continued 12.Qf3 Bf6 13.Bd2 0-0 14.0-0 Bxc3 15.Bxc3 Na4 16.Bc2 Nxc3 17.Qxc3 Qg5 18.Rae1 and a draw was agreed.

7...Be7

7...g6?! 8.d5! Ne5 9.f4 followed by 10.Bd4 will force Black to make an ugly move.

8.Bd3

White may also switch to the other setup, by means of 8.Nf3



Position after: 8.Nf3

A) The natural-looking 8...Bg4?! may already be quite suspicious because of what follows: 9.h3 Bh5 [9...Bxf3 10.Qxf3 is easily better for White, who has the pair of bishops and the push c4-c5 up his sleeve] 10.b3 0-0 11.Be2 Bf6 12.g4!



Position after: 12.g4!

We are following the instructive email game Volovici, D (2464) – Wilhelmi, D (2454), ICCF 2012, which illustrates my introductory note. Play continued 12...Bg6 13.h4 d5 [In the event of 13...h5 the simplest seems to be 14.g5 Be7 15.a3 stopping the jump ...Nb4. Then after Nf3-d2 White may just be able to grab the h5 pawn for free.] 14.c5 Nc8 15.Qd2 a5 16.h5 Be4 17.g5 Be7 18.g6



Position after: 18.g6

White has attained his primary goal, i.e. opening files in front of the enemy king, while his own monarch is still quite safe. It is doubtful whether Black could still have saved himself from the current position. 18...Bf6 [or 18...hxxg6 19.hxxg6 Bxxg6 20.0-0-0 when White will double on the h-file and possibly exchange the defender with Be2-d3] 19.0-0-0 Qe7 20.Nxe4 Qxe4 21.Ng5 Bxxg5 22.gxxh7+ Kh8 23.Bxxg5 a4 24.f3 Qe6 25.Bd3 f5 26.b4 a3 27.b5 Na5 28.Rde1 Qd7 29.Rhg1 Black resigned.

B) Starting with 8...Bf6!? as in Kuhne, D (2348) – Pavlov, V (2420) ICCF email 2014, allows Black to recapture with his bishop in case of a subsequent d4-d5 ...Ne5 Nxe5.

C) 8...0-0



Position after: 8...0-0

C1) 9.h3 Bf6

C1.1) Trying to prevent ...Bf5 with 10.Qc2 isn't particularly convincing. Besides 10...g6 and 10...d5, Black can also go for 10...Nb4 11.Qb3 c5 12.dxc5 dxc5 13.Rd1 Qe7 when he was fine in Kolar, P (2361) – Ferreira, N (2489) ICCF email 2007.

C1.2) 10.b3 Re8 11.Qd2 Bf5 12.g4 Bg6



Position after: 12...Bg6

Williams, T (2447) – Wilhelmi, D (2421) ICCF email 2018 reached this position. Interestingly, Black is up a valuable tempo compared to his disaster resulting from 8...Bg4?! (...Bf5-g6 instead of ...Bg4-h5-g6). This should be enough to get decent chances, an immediate idea being 13...Nb4 followed by ...c7-c5.

C2) 9.Be2!?

C3) 9.d5 Ne5 10.Nxe5 dxe5

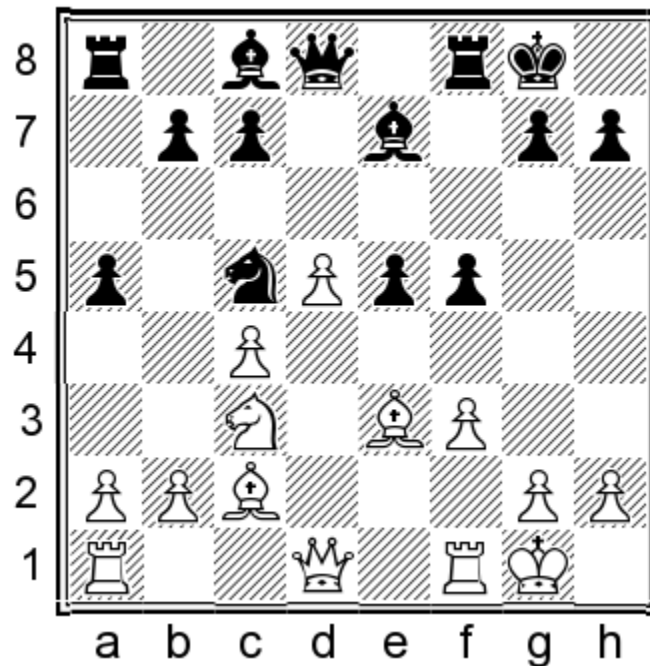


Position after: 10...dxe5

A change of the pawn structure has occurred (which, as mentioned earlier, Black can avoid if he opts for 8...Bf6). At first sight it favors White who can immediately set his pawn duo into motion, but things aren't so clear. At any rate, the game becomes more lively and White may not be familiar with this rather unexpected twist of events. Here you see some examples of White's numerous options.

C3.1) 11.c5 Nd7 12.d6 cxd6 13.cxd6 Bg5 14.Qf3 Bxe3 15.Qxe3 Qb6∞
Schweer, C (2367) – Legemaat, G (2345) ICCF email 2009.

C3.2) 11.Bd3 f5 12.0-0 At this juncture Black should either push 12...e4 or first contain his opponent's play with 12...Nd7 13.f3 Nc5 14.Bc2 a5∞ as in Kirwald, F (2362) – Koestner, W (2375) Remote email 2012.



Position after: 14...a5∞

This position is similar to a Sicilian Sveshnikov, ^(to the line)1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 e5 6.Ndb5 d6 7.Nd5 Nxd5 8.exd5 and so on, where instead of having a pawn at d6 Black has one on c7. This doesn't seem to alter the verdict of a complex game with mutual chances.

C3.3) 11.Qc2 c6 [11...f5!?] 12.d6 Bg5 13.Bxg5 Qxg5∞ White has a (protected) passed pawn but this is by far not the only significant factor in the position.

C3.4) 11.Qd2 f5 12.f3 Nd7 13.Bd3 Nc5 14.Bc2 a5 15.0-0-0 Bd6 Silva, A (2530) – Hugentobler, P (2446) ICCF email 2008, and again any outcome remains possible.

8...0-0



Position after: 8...0-0

9.b3

White might claim a tiny plus after 9.Nge2 Nb4 10.b3, but depriving his opponent of the bishop pair is definitely a small success for Black in my view.



Position after: 10.b3

10...Nxd3+ 11.Qxd3 c6 12.d5 Otherwise Black plays that move himself.
12...Nd7 ∞

**9...Nb4 10.Bb1 c5 11.Nge2 Bg4 12.0-0 cxd4 13.Bxd4 Nc6 14.Be3 Bxe2
15.Qxe2 Bf6 ∞**



Position after: 15...Bf6 ∞

Since White has issues to solve on the a1-h8 diagonal, active play by his opponent should compensate for the backward d6-pawn (...d6-d5 could come soon in fact) and White's two bishops. The position is unclear.

c) 6.Nc3 Nc6 7.d5

1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.c4 Nb6 5.exd6 exd6 6.Nc3 Nc6

Let's now examine what happens if White takes up the gauntlet and advances d4-d5, before focusing our attention to the eventual effectiveness of Black's concept.

7.d5



Position after: 7.d5

7...Ne5

7...Qe7+ looks like a decent alternative. 8.Be2 Ne5

A) 9.Be3 Bd7 This move is apparently clever since it rules out Qa4+ and threatens to grab the c4-pawn, thus enabling Black to win time to complete his development and connect his rooks. On the other hand, b2-b3 is a useful move for White and Black may want the d7-square free for a later ...Nb6-d7. [9...g6!?!]



Position after: 9...Bd7

10.b3 g6 11.Nf3 Bg7 12.Nxe5 Bxe5 13.Qd2 0-0 14.0-0² Akopian, V (2675) – Maghsoodloo, P (2576) Sharjah 2017.

B) The more ambitious 9.f4!?! needs further investigation.



Position after: 9.f4!?!?

9...Ng4 [9...Nexd4? runs into 10.Kf2!, threatening Bxc4 ...Nxc4 Qa4+ as well as Nf3 followed by Re1. Surprisingly, Black can't avoid losing material, for instance 10...Bd7 11.Nf3 0-0-0 12.Qb3+- and if 12...Na5 then 13.Qb4.] 10.Nf3 Ne3 11.Bxe3 Qxe3 This is difficult to assess [so is 10.Qd4 c5 11.dxc6 bxc6].

8.f4

8.Be2 Be7 9.f4 Ng6 10.Nf3



Position after: 10.Nf3

10...Nh4 [10...0-0 11.0-0 Bf6 This was possibly stronger. Among Black's useful moves are ...a7-a5, ... Re8, ...Bf5 and perhaps at some point the undermining ...c7-c6.] 11.0-0 Nxf3+ 12.Bxf3 0-0 13.b3² Shaw, J (2454) – Miles, A (2564) Birmingham 2001.



Position after: 8.f4

8...Ned7

8...Ng4 deserves attention too.

A) 9.Bd3!? Qe7+ [it is unclear whether provoking g2-g3 by means of 9...Qh4+!? would really benefit Black; 9...Be7 is likely to transpose into 9.Nf3] 10.Qe2 g6 11.a4



Position after: 11.a4

11...Nd7 [11...a6; or 11...a5 the latter stabilizes the black steed at b6, but a subsequent Nc3-b5 will be annoying] White can count on a slight advantage following 12.h3 Nc5 13.Bc2² Steinkellner, P (2356) – Verhoef, H (2443) ICCF email 2016. After the knight on g4 has withdrawn White will expel its brother by means of b2-b4 and bet that his space advantage will provide him the better chances.

B) 9.Nf3 Be7 10.Bd3 0-0 11.0-0



Position after: 11.0-0

At this juncture I prefer 11...c6 over 11...a5?! 12.h3 Nf6 13.Be3 which resulted in a better position for White in Perez Ponsa, F (2553) – Degraeve, J (2570) chess.com 2018. Black will get enough counterplay after 11...c6 in my opinion. Even though his opponent enjoys a space

advantage, the weaknesses induced by his numerous pawn-pushes may tell at a later stage.

9.Nf3

This move is more natural than 9.Qd4?! which was tried in Minasian, Art (2600) – Minasian, Ara (2483), Yerevan 1999, which continued 9...Be7! 10.Qxg7 Bf6



Position after: 10...Bf6

11.Qg4 Bxc3+ 12.bxc3 Qf6 13.Bd2 Nc5 14.Qg5 Qxg5 15.fxg5 Bf5©. White could have deviated earlier on but I think Black gets sufficient compensation everywhere after 10...Bf6.

9...Be7 10.Be3 Bf6 11.Qc2 0-0 12.Bd3 Re8 13.Kf2 g6



Position after: 13...g6

Wharrier, J (2367) – Raijmaekers, C (2236) ICCF email 2010. Black will likely follow up with ...c7-c6 and ...Nd7-c5, which should provide him with fairly decent chances.

d) 6.Nc3 Be7 7.Be3

1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.c4 Nb6 5.exd6 exd6 6.Nc3 Be7 7.Be3



Position after: 7.Be3

This move introduces an aggressive, albeit not fully sound, setup in my opinion.

7...0-0 8.Qf3 c6

I find this to be a safe solution for Black, rather than 8...Nc6 which may be OK too but is a lot sharper. 9.0-0-0 Be6 10.c5 Nc4 11.Bf4



Position after: 11.Bf4

This seems to be a critical position for the variation 8...Nc6. While 11...dxc5? turned out badly for Black in Caruana, F (2594) – Genocchio, D (2433) Martina Franca 2007, which continued 12.d5 Nd4 13.dxe6 fxe6 14.Bxc4 Rxf4 15.Qe3+–, I leave it to the reader to now investigate 11...g5 12.Qh5 f5 (or 12...gxf4 13.Bd3 f5 14.d5 N4e5 15.dxe6 Qe8) 13.Qh6 Bf6.

9.0-0-0 d5 10.c5 N6d7 11.Bd3

11.g4?! b6! Lakos, N – Zhukova, N Yerevan 1996 is even worse for White.

11...b6 12.cxb6 axb6



Position after: 12...axb6

Black is absolutely fine, not to say already better.

Vachier Lagrave, M (2576) – Bogut, Z (2443) Turin 2006.

(back to the text) This position is similar to a Sicilian Sveshnikov, 1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 e5 6.Ndb5 d6 7.Nd5 Nxd5 8.exd5 and so

on, where instead of having a pawn at d6 Black has one on c7.

e) 6.Nc3 Be7 7.Bd3

1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.c4 Nb6 5.exd6 exd6 6.Nc3 Be7 7.Bd3 0-0 8.Nge2



Position after: 8.Nge2

A basic position for the 5.exd6 exd6 variation has been reached. The move order 6...Nc6 we saw above was designed to improve on it (from the black perspective) by inciting a quick Bc1-e3, but no tragedy, Black's game remains acceptable!

8...Nc6

At first I wanted to recommend an approach based on this knight move, but then I changed my mind and decided to give you a larger choice. Since Black has a wide range of options here, I'll give you an overview of them in case one or the other appeals more to you.

A) 8...c6 Starting with this move or 8...Na6 doesn't seem to make a big difference and transpositions are highly probable. Indeed, once the center has been fixed, after Black plays ...d6-d5 and White replies c4-c5, practice has shown that the best placement for Black's queen's knight is e6, where it attacks the d4 pawn. 9.0-0 Na6 10.a3 Nc7



Position after: 10...Nc7

A1) 11.b4 Be6 [11...d5!? 12.c5 Nc4∞] 12.Qc2?! [12.Qb3! d5 13.c5 Nc4 compared to the 11...d5 line the insertion of Qb3/...Be6 looks to be slightly in Black's favor, but the computer still claims it was the way to go for White.] 12...g6 Trading the c4-pawn for the one on h7 was also worth considering. 13.Bh6 Re8 14.c5 Nbd5=



Position after: 14...Nbd5=

Shirov, A (2664) – Yuffa, D (2594) Moscow 2020. With a fantastic outpost at d5 for his knight(s), Black could be satisfied with the transition from the opening to the early middlegame.

A2) 11.h3 A more restrained approach. 11...Re8 12.b3 This way White avoids the possible sequence ...d6-d5 c5 ...Nc4. 12...d5 13.c5 Nd7 14.Bf4 Nf8 15.b4 Bf6∞



Position after: 15...Bf6∞

Volokitin, A (2628) – Kasimdzhanov, R (2683) Riyadh (rapid) 2017.

B) 8...Bf6 Knowing what follows, committing the dark-squared bishop now seems premature. 9.0-0 Re8 10.Ne4 Bf5



Position after: 10...Bf5

11.Nxd6! Qxd6 12.Bxf5 Nxc4 13.Qd3± Volokitin, A (2640) – Bortnyk, M (2422) Lvov 2016.

C) 8...Na6 9.b3 [The game continuation suggests that perhaps White can try to save a tempo with 9.a3.] 9...c6 10.0-0



Position after: 10.0-0

C1) 10...Nc7 11.h3 [In the event of 11.a4 a5 Black could possibly change his mind and reroute his knight to a6 and b4.] 11...d5 12.c5 Nd7 13.b4 Bf6 14.a4 Ne6

C1.1) 15.a5 g6∞ [15...Nxd4?! 16.Nxd4 Bxd4 17.Bxh7+ Kxh7 18.Qxd4²]

C1.2) 15.Be3 a5 16.b5



Position after: 16.b5

This occurred in Volokitin, A (2636) – Yuffa, D (2582) Riga (rapid) 2019, where Black now played 16...Re8 [he could have equalized with 16...Ndxc5! 17.dxc5 d4=].

C2) 10...Nb4 11.Bb1 d5 12.c5 Nd7 13.Ng3 g6 14.Bh6 Re8



Position after: 14...Re8

C2.1) 15.f4 Bf6 Threatening ...Nxc5. 16.a3 Na6 17.b4 This occurred in Hevia Alejano, C (2488) – Sadorra, J (2539) chess.com (rapid) 2018, where in place of 17...Nc7= Black could have renewed his threat to capture on c5 with 17...b6!. Then, after 18.cxb6 Qxb6 followed by 19...Nc7, his pressure on d4 keeps White busy enough to considerably slow down the attack on the kingside.

C2.2) 15.a3 Na6 16.Ra2 Bf8 17.Qd2 Bxh6 18.Qxh6 Nf8= Lomasov, S (2516) – Gordievsky, D (2610) Khanty-Mansiysk 2017.



Position after: 18...Nf8=

With h7 covered, any Nh5 is pointless and in reply to f2-f4 Black would block with ...f7-f5. He is now ready to reroute his queen's knight to e6.

D) 8...Bg4 9.f3 [9.b3 could transpose into 9.b3 or 9.0-0.] 9...Bh5 10.Nf4 Bg6 11.Nxg6 hxg6



Position after: 11...hxg6

We are following Savchenko, B (2562) – Demidov, M (2520) chess.com 2019. It appears that one way or another Black will get some counterplay connected with ...Bf6 and ...Nc6. 12.Be3 [Or 12.0-0 Bf6 13.Be3 Nc6,,. This move order has the merit of excluding 12...Bg5 and 12...Bh4+, options Black could have tried in the afore-mentioned game.] 12...Re8 13.0-0 Nc6 14.Bf2 Bh4!? 15.g3 Bf6 The position is roughly equal.



Position after: 8...Nc6

9.0-0

9.b3 In answer to the push ...d6-d5 White will most of the time advance c4-c5. The somewhat mysterious move b3 is thus designed more to rule out the jump ...Nc4 than to overprotect the c4-pawn. Indeed, if Black hits the bishop with a later...Nb4, the retreat Bb1 is usually a good remedy, the c4-pawn then being immune due to ...Nxc4 a3 ...Nc6 Qd3, with the dual threat Qxh7 mate and Qxc4.



Position after: 9.b3

A) 9...Bg4 will usually come to the same thing. 10.Be3 Bf6



Position after: 10...Bf6

At this juncture 11.0-0 will generally transpose into 9.0-0 since grabbing the d4-pawn means an unfavorable trade of pawns for Black (White will take once on d4 and then on h7). 11.f3 is interesting and 11.Qd2 represents by far the most popular white choice. Here you see some examples: **A1)** 11.f3 Bh4+

A1.1) The engine estimates that White gets adequate compensation following 12.g3!? Bxf3 13.0-0 Bxe2 14.Qxe2 Bf6 [or 14...Bg5 15.Rae1]15.Qf2.

A1.2) 12.Ng3 Re8



Position after: 12...Re8

13.Kf2 [Stronger was 13.Qd2! Bg5 14.Nd1².] 13...Bh5 [13...Rxe3!? 14.Kxe3 The exposed white king undoubtedly provides Black with compensation for the exchange, but concretely it isn't obvious how to proceed.] 14.Re1 d5 15.c5 Nc8 16.Kg1 Bg6[∞] Drygalov, A (2416) – Vavulin, M (2595) Sochi 2017

A2) 11.Qd2 Re8 12.0-0



Position after: 12.0-0

12...Bh5 [12...Bxe2 doesn't change much: at the end of the day Black doesn't have a lot to show for parting with his bishop. 13.Bxe2 d5 14.c5 Nc8 15.Rae1 N8e7 16.Bg4² Corrales Jimenez, F (2532) – Yuffa, D (2594) lichess.org 2020] 13.Nf4 Bg6 14.Nxg6 hxg6 15.Be4² Horvath, A (2517) – Ruck, R (2524) Ajka (rapid) 2019.

B) 9...Bf6 10.Be3 Ne7 11.Ne4 Nf5 12.Nxf6+ Qxf6 13.0-0 Nxe3 14.fxe3 Qe7 15.Qd2



Position after: 15.Qd2

This position arose in Naiditsch, A – Bischoff, K Furth 2001, where rather than 15...Bd7 16.Nc3² Black should have preferred 15...Re8 16.Nf4 Qxe3+ 17.Qxe3 Rxe3 18.Rae1 Rxe1 19.Rxe1 Kf8. White can now recover

his missing pawn by means of 20.c5 dxc5 21.dxc5 Nd7 22.Nd5 Rb8 23.Nxc7 but then 23...Nf6 is about equal.

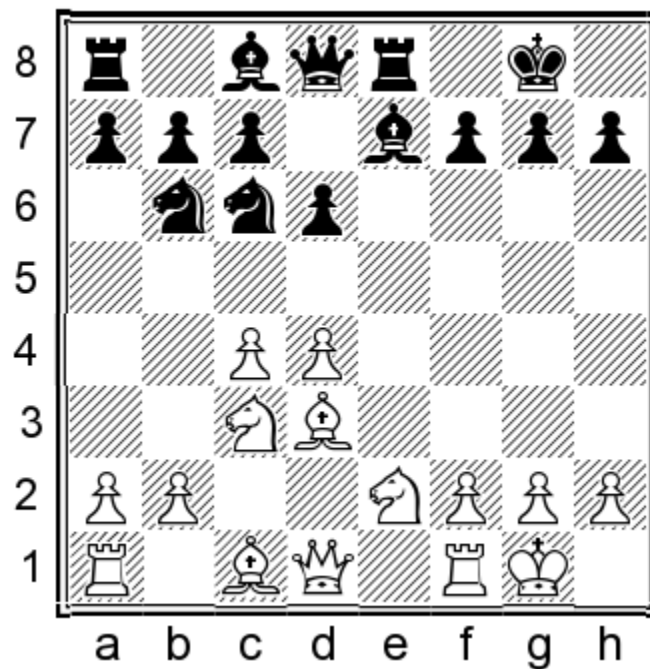
After 9.0-0 Black has a large array of options.



Position after: 9.0-0

9...Bf6

A) 9...Re8



Position after: 9...Re8

A1) 10.Be3 Nb4 11.b3 d5 12.c5 Nd7 13.Bb1 c6 14.a3 Na6 15.Qd2 Nc7 16.b4 g6



Position after: 16...g6

Ibarra Jerez, J (2523) – Hernandez Carmenates, H (2570) Montcada 2012. A common picture for this line; Black is solid and doesn't suffer much from his relative lack of space. Soon the dark-squared bishop will be rerouted to g7 and a knight will land at e6.

A2) 10.b3



Position after: 10.b3

A2.1) 10...Bg5 11.d5 Bxc1 12.Rxc1 Ne5 13.Bb1 Qh4 14.Qd4 Qxd4 15.Nxd4 a6 Drabke, L (2456) – Fridman, D (2569) playchess.com 2005.



Position after: 15...a6

White's space advantage gives him an enduring advantage, even if his pawns are on the same color squares as his bishop.

A2.2) The dynamic 10...a5 doesn't fully equalize either. 11.Be4 [11.Be3!? Nb4 12.Bb1 a4 13.a3 axb3 14.Qxb3 Nc6 15.c5!² Pap, M – Del Rio de Angelis, S Linares 2020.



Position after: 15.c5!²

White's activity slightly outweighs his inferior pawn structure.] 11...a4 12.Be3 axb3 13.axb3 Rxa1 14.Qxa1 Bg5



Position after: 14...Bg5

Schaub, M – Holzer, J ICCF email 2014. [A few other moves were worthy of attention, such as 14...g6; and 14...Bf6, but White keeps a slight plus everywhere owing to his space advantage].

A2.3) 10...Bf8 11.h3 Nb4 12.Be3 [or 12.Bb1 and if Black tries 12...a5 13.a3 Nc6, with the idea of ...a5-a4, then 14.Bd3² keeps slightly better prospects.] 12...c6 13.Bb1 d5 14.a3 Na6 15.c5 Nd7 16.b4 Nc7 17.Bd3 b6 Emms, J (2537) – Davies, N (2481) Southend 2002.



Position after: 17...b6

White has more space but Black is rock-solid, his only weakness, the c6 pawn, being out of reach.

B) 9...Bg4 10.f3 Bh5 11.b3 Re8



Position after: 11...Re8

B1) 12.Be3 Bg5 13.Bf2 Nb4 [13...d5 14.c5 Nc8 15.g4 Bg6 16.f4 Bxd3 17.Qxd3 Be7 18.Qf3± Kovchan, A (2583) – Seel, C (2474) Germany 2016. White didn't quite manage to snaffle the d5-pawn because of the trick 18...Bf8 19.Nxd5? Rxe2, but he replied 19.f5 and stood clearly on top.] 14.Bb1 d5? [14...c6!] 15.a3 Nc6



Position after: 15...Nc6

This happened in Pichot, A – Valerga, D Villa Martelli 2016.

Now rather than 16.cxd5? Nxd5 which was more or less OK for Black, his 14th-move mistake could have been punished by 16.c5! Nc8 17.Ba2 Threatening g4, and if ...Bg6 then f4-f5 wins a piece. 17...Bg6 18.b4 N8e7 19.g4±

B2) I am less fond of 12.Bb2 for White. 12...Bf6 [12...Bg5 makes sense too, since White is understandably reluctant to push his f-pawn forward 13.Ng3 Be3+ 14.Kh1 Bg6 15.Bxg6 hxg6 16.d5 Nb4∞.] 13.Kh1 Nb4 14.Bf5?!



Position after: 14.Bf5?!

We are following Landa, K (2587) – Appel, R (2513) Germany 2003 where instead of 14...c6 15.a3 Na6² Black should have opted for 14...Bg6!=.

C) 9...Nb4!?! 10.Bb1 c6 11.Ng3 g6 12.b3 a5 13.Bh6 Re8 14.Qd2 d5,,



Position after: 14...d5,,

Perez Ponsa, F (2577) – Valerga, D (2458) Buenos Aires 2016. This game was played two weeks after Pichot – Valerga, see 9...Bg4. Black had learned his lesson in the meantime!

Let's see what happens after 9...Bf6.



Position after: 9...Bf6

10.b3

10.Be3

A) 10...Bg4 11.h3 [11.f3!?!] 11...Bh5 12.Qd2 Bg6 13.b3 Re8 14.Rae1 Ne7 [14...d5 wouldn't have solved the problems either: 15.c5 Nc8 16.Bb5².] 15.g4



Position after: 15.g4

Naiditsch, A (2612) – Polaczek, R (2431) Vlaardingen 2005. White prevented the jump ...Ne7-f5 and held the upper hand, his kingside weaknesses being meaningless for the moment.

B) 10...Nb4

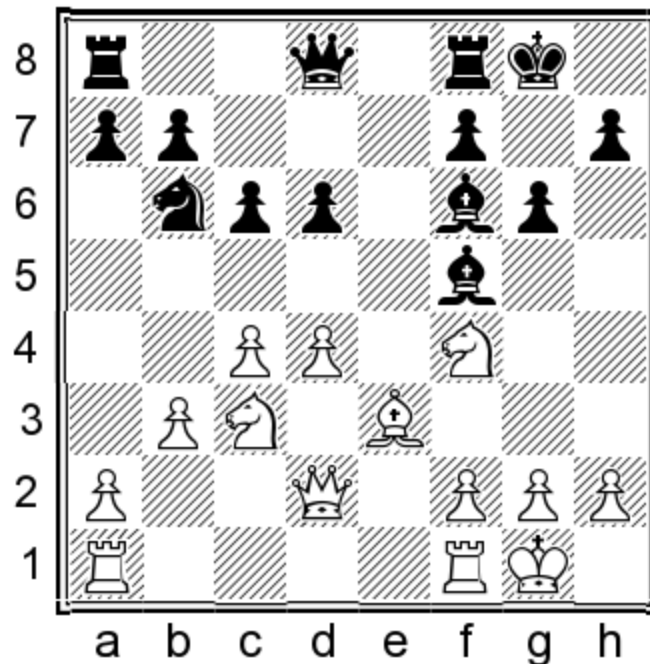
B1) 11.Ng3 d5 12.c5 Nc4 13.Bb1



Position after: 13.Bb1

This was Ganguly, S (2613) – Shimanov, A (2606) St Petersburg 2014, where instead of the inaccurate 13...Nc6?!, 13...g6! 14.a3 Nc6 maintained the balance.

B2) 11.Nf4 Nxd3 12.Qxd3 g6 13.b3 [13.a4 Bf5 14.Qe2 Nc8 15.Qf3 c6 16.Nh5 Bh8∞] 13...Bf5 14.Qd2 c6∞



Position after: 14...c6∞

Baramidze, D (2569) – Appel, R (2529) Germany 2007.

10...Re8

Again the natural 10...Bg4 doesn't seem best. 11.Be3 Black has a few options now.



Position after: 11.Be3

A) 11...Re8 12.Qd2 d5 13.c5 Nc8 14.Ng3 [14.f3!?] 14...N8e7 [14...g6!?] 15.h3 Be6 16.Nce2 Ng6 17.f4!f Cornette, M (2558) – Abasov, N (2632) chess24.com 2019.

B) 11...Bh5 12.h3 d5 13.c5 Nc8 14.Qd2 [The sharper 14.g4!? also makes sense, the black pieces being too distant to cause the white king any sort of problem.] 14...Bg6 15.Nf4 N8e7 $\infty/2$



Position after: 15...N8e7 ∞

Abdusattorov, N (2395) – Fier, A (2614) St Petersburg (rapid) 2016.

11.Be3



Position after: 11.Be3

11...a5

11...Bg4 – see 10...Bg4.

12.Ne4

White could have prevented the ...d6-d5 push by means of 12.Be4 a4 and now either 13.Qd2 or 13.h3 may be a bit more pleasant for him but still rather balanced.

12...Bf5?!

The game Novikov, S – Kobalia, M Moscow blitz 2015 reached this position and now White missed a chance to gain a small edge.

12...Bh4!? is an alternative.



Position after: 12...Bf5?!

13.N4g3?!

A) 13.Nxf6+! Qxf6 14.Bxf5 Qxf5 15.d5 Ne5 16.Bxb6 cxb6 17.Nd4 or 16.Nd4!? Qd7 17.Qc2 should be critical.

B) The tactical attempt 13.Nxd6 is less convincing in view of 13...Rxe3 14.Nxf5 Re8 15.Qd2 g6 16.Nh6+ Kf8=.

Conclusion: Black has two approaches to meet the white Nc3/Bd3 and Nge2 setup. The most appropriate path for him to get a sound position may be based on the c6/d5 structure, whereas White seems to keep a small pull when his opponent opts for ...Nc6/...Bg4/...Bf6, as you can see in the numerous examples throughout this section. Black can start with an early ...Na6 and follow up with ...c6 and then ...d5, or he can harass the enemy bishop with ...Nc6-b4, then go ...g7-g6, and after a2-a3 retreat his knight to a6. Both look adequate since in the first case White would likely reply a3 and then b4, while in the second both sides lose time (...Nc6-b4-a6 for Black, Bd3-b1 and then b2-b3 to cover c4 for White). The ensuing positions offer White a space advantage but Black is very solid and finds good spots for his pieces, notably the perfect e6-square for a knight.

f) 6.Nf3 Be7 7.Bd3

1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.c4 Nb6 5.exd6 exd6 6.Nf3

6.Nc3 Be7 7.h3 is likely to transpose into 6.Nf3. Note that White can choose to allow or prevent the pin by ...Bg4.



Position after: 6.Nf3

6...Be7

6...Bg4

A) Inserting the duet 7.h3 Bh5 shouldn't change much, but of course the game can then shoot off into several different directions. For instance: 8.Be3 Be7 9.Be2 0-0 10.0-0 c6. Black threatens to take on f3 now that the recapture Bxf3 would permit ...Nxc4. 11.Nbd2 Na6 12.a3 Nc7 13.b4 d5 14.c5 Nd7 15.a4 Ne6=



Position after: 15...Ne6=

This is how the recent rapid encounter Frolyanov, D (2542) – Bernadskiy, V (2594) Riga 2019 went and it gave mutual chances. Black will soon have to decide whether he wants to throw in ...f7-f5 or not, perhaps preceded by ...Qc7, aiming to provoke g2-g3. The position is balanced.

B) 7.Be3 Be7 8.Nbd2



Position after: 8.Nbd2

Developing the knight this way is less natural and in my opinion somewhat inferior to the standard Nb1-c3, although it doesn't entail only drawbacks; White doesn't need to fear the sequence ...d6-d5 c4-c5 ...Nc4, for instance. 8...0-0 [8...c5!?] 9.Qc2 Nc6 [9...f5!? here or on the next move, maybe combined with ...c7-c5 if White reacts with 10.g3] 10.a3 d5 11.c5 Nc4!? 12.Nxc4 dxc4 13.Qxc4



Position after: 13.Qxc4

This happened in Czarnota, P (2554) – Tischbierek, R (2486) Germany 2007 where Black didn't have quite enough compensation following 13...Bxf3 14.gxf3 Bf6 15.0-0-0. The engine suggests deviating with 13...Bf6 14.0-0-0 b6, although it sees a slight white edge here too.

C) For 7.Be2 – see 6...Be7 7.Be2.



Position after: 6...Be7

7.Bd3

7.Be3 0-0

A) 8.Nbd2?! This feels strange to me when Black hasn't committed himself to ...Bg4. 8...Bf5 9.Be2 Bf6 10.0-0 Nc6 11.a3



Position after: 11.a3

A1) The typical 11...d5!? 12.c5 Nc8 ∞ was available too and perhaps an even better version of what Black gets following 8.Nc3; there is no pressure on d5 and the light-squared bishop is more active on f5. On the other hand, that particular square isn't free for the knight on c8.

A2) 11...a5 12.d5 Ne5?! This inaccuracy enabled White to take a slight edge after 13.Nd4² in Tomczak, J (2598) – Hnydiuk, A (2424) Suwalki 2017. Instead 12...Ne7 or 12...Nb8 would have maintained the equilibrium; White's space advantage is counterbalanced by his badly-placed knight at d2 and Black's powerful bishops.

B) 8.Nc3 Nc6 9.Be2 Bg4 10.b3 d5 11.c5 Nc8 12.b4 a6 13.Qb3 Be6



Position after: 13...Be6

Enders, P (2516) – Bischoff, K (2541) Furth 2001. Black's play is easy: ...Bf6, ...N8e7 and then ...Nf5 if allowed. In the event of g2-g4, threatening to win a piece with g4-g5, then either ...h7-h6 or ...g7-g6.

7...0-0

Black can also go for the pin, by means of 7...Bg4, which his opponent could have sidestepped with the over-cautious 7.h3. The following sample lines suggest, however, that he would have to work quite a bit to achieve full equality: 8.h3 Bh5 9.0-0 Nc6 10.Be3 0-0 11.Nc3



Position after: 11.Nc3

A handful of games have reached this position, where Black mostly tried the solid 11...Bf6. The two main variations are analyzed below, but 11...f5 also merits some attention.

A) 11...d5!? is the thematic move.. For instance, 12.c5 Nc4 13.Bxc4 dxc4 14.Qe2. White is threatening g4 ...Bg6 Qxc4, when the weakening of White's kingside would not compensate Black for the loss of a pawn. 14...Bxf3 15.Qxf3 Nxd4 16.Qe4



Position after: 16.Qe4

Now 16...Ne6 17.Rad1 sees White better centralized. [One needs courage to embark upon 16...Bxc5 17.Rad1 Re8 18.Qf4, when in order to save his pinned knight Black has to go 18...g5 19.Qg4 f5 20.Qh5©.]

B) 11...Bf6 12.g4! Bg6



Position after: 12...Bg6

We are following Shirov, A – Macieja, B Bydgoszcz 2001, which continued 13.Bxg6! [instead 13.Ne4?! allows Black to equalize by means of 13...Bxe4 14.Bxe4 Nxc4 15.Bxh7+ Kxh7 16.Qd3+ g6 17.Qxc4 d5= Snuverink, J – Span, P Netherlands 1999].

B1) 13...hxc6 14.g5 Be7 15.d5 Ne5 16.Nxe5 dxe5 17.Qg4



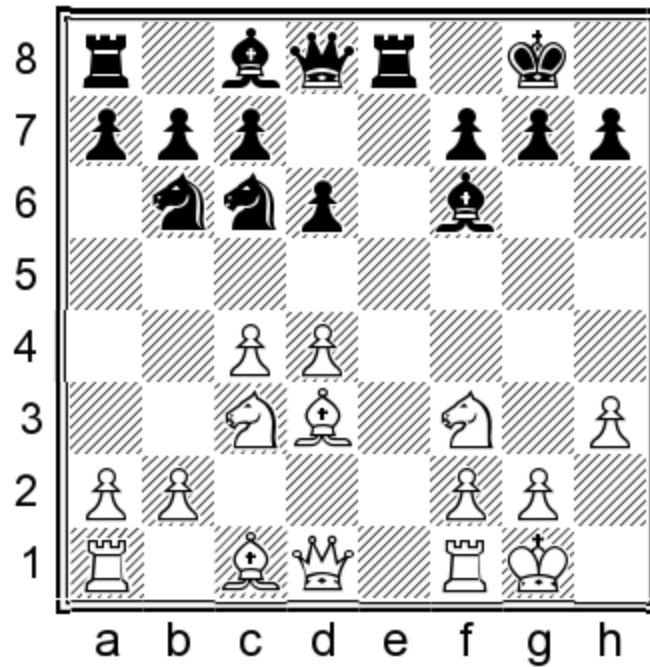
Position after: 17.Qg4

Now rather than 17...Qc8 which left Black with a disgraceful ending following 18.b3 Qxg4+ 19.hxc4, he should have tried 17...Bb4! 18.Ne2 and now either 18...Qe7 or 18...Re8, vacating the f8-square while preparing to reroute the horse to f5, via c8. White may be a bit better, but the outcome remains more uncertain.

B2) The alternative recapture 13...fxg6?! could be justified by the weakening g2-g4, but analysis shows that the energetic 14.g5! gives White a marked edge after both 14...Be7 15.d5 and the speculative piece-sacrifice 14...Nxc4 15.gxf6 Qxf6 16.Qe2±. I wasn't totally convinced at first, but failed to find enough compensation for Black.

8.h3 Nc6 9.0-0 Bf6 10.Nc3 Re8

A rather important position since after White's eighth move his opponent couldn't develop his light-squared bishop efficiently.



Position after: 10...Re8

This means, should the current position reveal itself to be in White's favor, that Black should have rushed with either ...Bf5 or ...Bg4. The following games and sample lines tend, however, to validate the black approach.

11.b3

11.Bc2 is quite sensible too, intending to go 12.b3 only after 11...g6.



Position after: 11.Bc2

A) 11...Nb4 12.Bb1 g6 [the immediate 12...Nxc4 runs into 13.Qb3, but trying to be clever backfires: 12...c5? 13.d5± Nxc4?? 14.a3 Na6 15.Qd3+–] 13.a3 Nc6



Position after: 13...Nc6

Now Black would be rather happy to see 14.b3 a5!, but the uncommon 14.Ba2! Bf5 15.Bf4² turns out to be better for White.

B) 11...a5 12.Bf4



Position after: 12.Bf4

B1) The suspicious 12...Nb4!? 13.Bb1 Nxc4 ends up pretty messy and “only” ² according to the computer, although I wouldn’t recommend going for it without a thorough check: 14.a3 Nxb2 15.Qb3 [15.Qd2 Nc4 16.Qd1 is a draw by repetition] 15...N4d3 16.Bc1 Be6 17.Qc2 Nxc1 18.Rxc1 Nc4 19.Qxh7+ Kf8² and now 20.d5 is interesting, so are 20.Be4; and 20.Re1.

B2) 12...g6 13.c5 Nc4 14.Nd5



Position after: 14.Nd5

This happened in Frolyanov, D (2566) – Kobalia, M (2623) Kaliningrad 2015, where after the error 14...Nxb2? [14... Be6!= would have been the right answer] White then missed 15.Qc1! Nxd4 16.Nxd4 Bxd4 17.cxd6 cxd6 18.Bg5 f6 19.Be3± and after the game continuation, 15.Qd2? Be6 16.Nxf6+ Qxf6 17.Bg5 Qg7, the position was again balanced.

11...Be6 12.Be3 d5 13.c5 Nd7 14.Ne2



Position after: 14.Ne2

This position was reached in the blitz game Popov, I – Yuffa, D Riga 2019. Black then chose 14...g6

and after 15.Qd2 Ne7 he was solid but slightly worse.

A better try was 14...Nb4 15.Nf4 [15.Bb1? Nxc5] 15...Nxd3 16.Qxd3 Nf8



Position after: 16...Nf8

with possibly ...c6 and ...Ng6 to follow and a rough equality. Having swapped a set of pieces should prove useful to Black, who has less space.

g) 6.Nf3 Be7 7.Be2

1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.c4 Nb6 5.exd6 exd6 6.Nf3 Be7 7.Be2 0-0



Position after: 7...0-0

8.0-0

A) 8.Nc3 Bg4 9.0-0 At this crossroads Black should decide whether he wants his pawn or his knight on c6, both bringing him close to equality in my opinion. Here you have illustrations of both options.



Position after: 9.0-0

A1) 9...c6 10.Re1 N8d7 [Obviously not 10...Bxf3?! 11.Bxf3 Nxc4?? 12.Qe2+-.] 11.Bf4 Re8 12.Qd3 Nf8 13.Rad1



Position after: 13.Rad1

We are following Smirnov, A (2508) – Rozentalis, E (2513) Anogia 2017, where the Lithuanian GM now went slightly astray. The explanation probably lies in the fact he overlooked his opponent's 16th move. 13...Ne6?! [13...d5! was around level.] 14.Bg3 d5 15.cxd5 Nxd5 16.Ng5! Bxg5 17.Bxg4 Nef4²

A2) 9...Nc6 10.Re1 Bf6 11.c5 dxc5 12.dxc5



Position after: 12.dxc5

12...Bxc3?! [12...Qxd1! was the cleanest way to level the game since 13.Bxd1?! Nd7 is even a trifle better for Black, while after 13.Rxd1 Bxc3 14.cxb6 Ba5 I don't see any problem] 13.bxc3 Qxd1 14.Bxd1 Rfe8?? [Black had to go 14...Nd5 15.Bd2 when the two white bishops slightly outweigh the damaged structure, but not more] 15.Rxe8+ Rxe8 16.cxb6 Bxf3 17.gxf3



Position after: 17.gxf3

Gunina, V (2499) – Zhao, X (2490) Khanty Mansiysk 2017. The Chinese GM had probably intended 17...Re1+ 18.Kg2 Rxd1 but since that loses to 19.bxc7 Ne7 20.Ba3+– White just remained a piece up.

B) 8.h3

B1) 8...Be6!? was employed recently in the rapid game Khusnutdinov, R (2491) – Isanzhulov, A (2355) Almaty 2019.



Position after: 8...Be6!?

9.d5 [had White protected his c-pawn by either 9.b3; or 9.Nbd2, a likely follow-up would have been 9...d5 10.c5 Nc8, aiming for the setup we are now familiar with: ...Nc6, ...Bf6 and eventually ...Nc8-e7-f5] 9...Bd7 [there was nothing wrong with 9... Bf5] 10.0-0



Position after: 10.0-0

Now rather than 10...a5?! 11.Nc3², I'd prefer either 10...Na6 11.Nc3 Bf6 12.Ne4 Re8 or 10...Bf6 11.Nc3 Bxc3 12.bxc3 Na6[∞].

B2) 8...Bf5 9.Nc3



Position after: 9.Nc3

9...Bf6 [9...Re8 was probably more cautious, to discourage White from the coming pawn-storm, since in that case a subsequent g4-g5 wouldn't win a useful tempo by hitting the dark-squared bishop] 10.g4!?

B2.1) After 10...Bg6?! the bishop would have been a target, enabling the white offensive to gain speed: 11.h4 or 11.g5 Be7 12.h4,

B2.2) 10...Be6 11.g5 Be7 12.d5 Bd7 13.h4f



Position after: 13.h4f

Smeets, J (2596) – Movsesian, S (2640) Baden-Baden 2019. Black has succeeded in luring the enemy pawns forward, in the true spirit of the Alekhine Defense, but maybe exaggeratedly so. At any rate this double-edged situation seems objectively in White's favor.

Let's return to 8.0-0.



Position after: 8.0-0

8...Bf6

The other usual moves make sense too.

A) 8...Bf5 9.Nc3 Bf6 10.Be3 Re8?! [10...Nc6 is fairly standard and close to equal.] Black's improvisation was not crowned with success in Dvoirys, S (2562) – Zilberman, Y (2513) Cappelle-la-Grande 1999.



Position after: 10...Re8?!

11.Rc1 [The straightforward 11.c5! was probably stronger since Black could have resorted to 11...Nc6 again.] 11...h6?! 12.c5! dxc5 13.dxc5 White has seized the initiative.

B) 8...Bg4

B1) 9.Nbd2?! Re8! 10.h3 Bh5 11.Re1 Bf6



Position after: 11...Bf6

Black had already equalized comfortably in Perez Candelario, M (2463) – Korneev, O (2559) Elgoibar 2003. I give the following few moves to show how fast things can deteriorate if White is having a bad day: 12.g4?! [12.Nf1=] 12...Bg6 13.Nf1 h6 14.Ne3?! c5 15.d5 N8d7μ.

B2) 9.h3 Bh5 10.Bf4 Nc6 11.Nbd2 Bf6 12.d5



Position after: 12.d5

We are following Negi, P (2640) – Megaranto, S (2517) Ho Chi Minh City 2012, where rather than 12...Ne7 Black could have tried 12...Nb4!?. After the game move and then 13.Qb3 the move 13...Bg6 was perhaps better than the actual continuation: 13...Ng6 14.Be3 Bxf3 15.Nxf3?. White's two bishops secured him a small but lasting edge.

B3) 9.Nc3 transposes into 8.Nc3.

9.Nc3



Position after: 9.Nc3

9...Nc6

9...Bg4 10.h3 Bxf3?! Parting with the bishop for no reason. 11.Bxf3 c6 [if 11...Nc6 then 12.c5! solves the problem of the double attack, opens the position a little for White's bishops and gains a slight edge] 12.b3 d5 13.cxd5 Nxd5 14.Nxd5 cxd5 15.Be3 Nc6² Looshnikov, N (2455) – Dyachkov, S (2549) Cheliabinsk 2005.

10.h3 Bf5



Position after: 10...Bf5

11.Bf4!

White's most frequent and probably best choice.

11.Be3 d5 Not forced but this looks alright.

A) If 12.c5 Nc4 13.Bf4



Position after: 13.Bf4

Black should refrain from the capture 13...Nxb2 because of 14.Qb3 Nc4 15.Bxc7!. A stronger move is 13...Re8 when the analogous shot also leads to parity. 14.Bxc7 Nxb2 15.Qd2 Qxc7 16.Nxd5 Qd8 17.Nxf6+ Qxf6 18.Qxb2 Be4= Black will follow up with ...Rad8, after which he will recover his sacrificed pawn.

B) 12.b3 is interesting too, even though Black's forces are perfectly placed to press on the white center. Then both 12...dxc4 13.bxc4



Position after: 13.bxc4

13...Na5 14.c5 and 13...Be6 14.d5 Bxc3 15.Rc1© give reciprocal chances.

C) 12.cxd5 Nxd5= Bricard, E (2500) – Horvath, C (2500) Paris 1995.

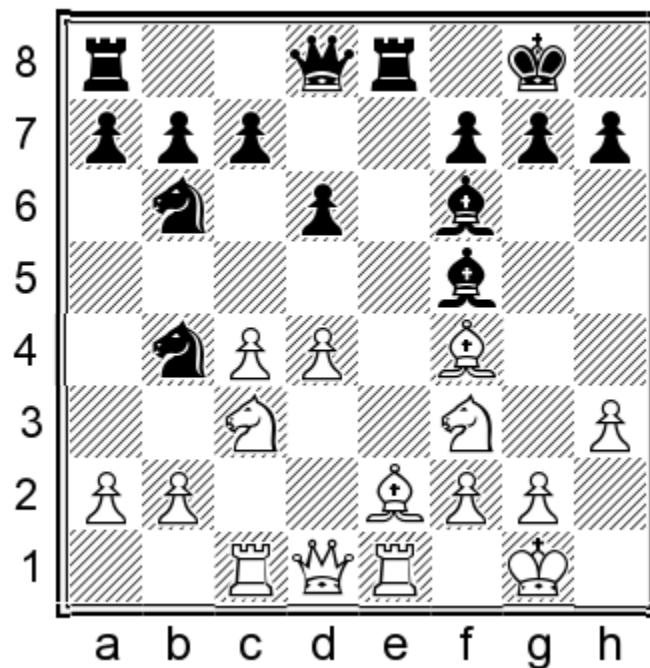
11...Re8



Position after: 11...Re8

12.Rc1

The inaccurate 12.Re1?! allows Black to simplify and achieve a level game following 12...Nb4 13.Rc1



Position after: 13.Rc1

13...Rxe2! 14.Nxe2 [14.Qxe2 Nd3 15.Bg3 Nxc1 16.Rxc1 c6=] 14...Nd3=
Degraeve, J (2569) – Bauer, C (2636) Cannes 2005.

12...h6

Safeguarding Black from a potential g4-g5. Although Black usually strives for the ...d6-d5 push in this kind of position, that source of counterplay may not give him full equality here.

12...Bg6 13.Re1 a6 14.b3 d5 15.c5 Nc8 16.b4²



Position after: 16.b4²

Gallagher, J (2545) – Sutter, O (2355) Switzerland 1997.

13.b3 Qd7 14.Re1 Re7 15.Qd2 Rae8 16.d5

It isn't easy to make any progress without this move.

16...Nb4 17.Be3 Bxh3 18.gxh3 Qxh3 19.Bf4 Nd7©



Position after: 19...Nd7©

All this happened in the correspondence game Balabaev, F (2380) – Gather, J (2419) IECC email 2002, which eventually ended peacefully. The level of the belligerents is in my view an indication that Black had enough compensation.

Conclusion: Many different move orders lead to the same or similar positions in this section. Black can notably start with ...Nc6 or ...Bf6 and sometimes even with ...Bg4. As we saw, Black seems to have sufficient resources everywhere, whether he develops his light-squared bishop to g4 or f5 or leaves it "at home" (he may have to, if White opts for a quick h2-h3 followed by Bd3). In some cases Black will have the choice between placing his knight or his pawn at c6, with both options leading to approximate equality. I don't believe White can really fight for an edge with an early Nbd2 (rather than the traditional Nc3), but a pawn-storm on the kingside (after ...Bg4 h3 ...Bh5 g4 ...Bg6 h4 and so on) could prove dangerous, especially if Black has committed himself to an early ...Bf6.

Chapter 5

Exchange Variation with 5...cxd6

1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.c4 Nb6 5.exd6 cxd6

Chapter Guide

Chapter 5 – Exchange Variation with 5...cxd6

The main path for Black in this chapter is the so-called Voronezh Variation, when White uses the setup 6.Nc3/7.Be3/8.Rc1/9.b3. We will examine earlier deviations from White as well as the sensible options available for Black on move nine, my recommendation being 9...Bf5. The famous Voronezh endgame that arises after 9...e5 10.dxe5 dxe5 11.Qxd8 Rxd8 is covered in the Bonus Lines chapter. It is quite reliable but I dislike its forced character and the fact that Black needs to memorize many variations to equalize step by step, without getting real winning chances.

1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.c4 Nb6 5.exd6 cxd6

a) 6.d5 --

b) 6.d5 e5

c) 6.Nf3 g6 7.--, 7.h3 Bg7 8.Nc3

d) 6.Nf3 g6 7.h3 Bg7 8.Be2

e) 6.Nf3 g6 7.Nc3

f) 6.Nc3 g6 7.Bd3

g) 6.Nc3 g6 7.Be3 Bg7 8.--, 8.Rc1 Nc6

h) 6.Nc3 g6 7.Be3 Bg7 8.Rc1 0-0 9.--, 9.b3 --

i) 6.Nc3 g6 7.Be3 Bg7 8.Rc1 0-0 9.b3 Bf5 10.--

j) 6.Nc3 g6 7.Be3 Bg7 8.Rc1 0-0 9.b3 Bf5 10.d5

k) 6.Nc3 g6 7.Be3 Bg7 8.Rc1 0-0 9.b3 Bf5 10.Be2

l) 6.Nc3 g6 7.Be3 Bg7 8.Rc1 0-0 9.b3 Bf5 10.Nf3

a) 6.d5 --

1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.c4 Nb6 5.exd6 cxd6 6.d5



Position after: 6.d5

The primary goal of this sideline is to seize space in the center, and possibly discourage Black from employing a kingside fianchetto, but as we will see even that option can't be ruled out. The biggest merits of pushing 6.d4-d5 are in my view its surprise effect and the fact that this line remains relatively unexplored. From a theoretical point of view, though, Black has several ways to reach a decent game.

6...e6

A) 6...g6 This is precisely what Black is supposed to avoid, but it turns out to be nevertheless quite playable! For that reason and the purpose of an easy-to-learn repertoire book, Kornev only covers 6...g6 and shows how to achieve a roughly equal game as Black. 7.Qd4



Position after: 7.Qd4

A1) 7...Rg8!? By moving his rook Black voluntarily gives up the right to castle but in return he will likely get nice piece-play. Indeed, ...Bg7 is imminent while Black's b8-knight transfers to c5 (or in some lines b4), his light-squared bishop to f5, the queen's rook to c8. 8.Qh4 Tempting but maybe not best since after a subsequent ...e7-e5 White won't be able to capture dxe6 en passant. 8...h5 [8...h6!?] 9.Bd2 Na6 10.Be2



Position after: 10.Be2

At this junction, rather than 10...Nc5?! as played in Hoffmann, P (2382) – Khenkin, I (2632) Dresden 2010, Black should have preferred 10...Bg7 11.Bc3 e5!.

A2) The ugly and far more frequent 7...f6 is fine as well because White won't be able to prevent ...e7-e5, a thrust Black could even wait to execute (...Bg7 followed by ...0-0 could come first).

A3) 7...e5 8.dxe6 f6 9.Nc3 Nc6 10.Qe3 d5 11.cxd5 Nxd5=



Position after: 11...Nxd5=

The e6-pawn is bound to fall and the two belligerents soon agreed a draw in Vazquez, G (2527) – Fier, A (2560) chess.com 2020.

B) 6...N8d7 7.Be3 [On moves like 7.Nc3 and 7.b3 Black would use the very same setup.] 7...g6 8.Qd2 Nf6 9.Nc3



Position after: 9.Nc3

B1) The knight sally 9...Ng4?! is a shot in the dark after 10.Bf4! [but not 10.Bd4?! Bh6! followed by 11...0-0 or 11.f4 e5! 12.dxe6 0-0∞].

B2) 9...Bd7?! Hess, R (2394) – Nakamura, H (2651) Connecticut 2007.

B3) C&K correctly point out that Black should rather continue 9...Bg7, 10...0-0 and then 11...e6. If White then takes 12.dxe6 there will most probably follow 12...Bxe6 and then 13...d6-d5.

Back to 6...e6.



Position after: 6...e6

7.Nc3

7.a4

A) As often, it remains to be seen who will “have the last laugh” after 7...a5, i.e. which side will benefit more from the weaknesses/outposts

newly created on the queenside. At any rate, the problem of his queen's knight will be easy to solve for Black as he can anchor it at either b4 or c5.

B) 7...exd5 8.cxd5 Be7 9.a5 N6d7 10.Nf3 0-0 11.Be2



Position after: 11.Be2

White stood better in Shirov, A (2730) – Degraeve, J (2573) Germany 2009 after 11...b6 but in the event of 11...Bf6 the verdict would probably have been the same. For instance, 12.0-0 Nc5 13.Nbd2 Re8 14.Nc4 Nba6 15.Bf4 Ne4 16.Re1² followed possibly by Ra3-e3.

7...Be7



Position after: 7...Be7

8.Nf3

8.Bd3 0-0 9.Nge2 Na6 [9...exd5 10.cxd5 N8d7 11.h3 Ne5 12.Bc2



Position after: 12.Bc2

also gave reciprocal chances in Mazur, S (2388) – Markos, J (2546) Aix-les-Bains 2011.] 10.b3 [The alternative 10.a3 Nc5 11.Bc2 a5 also kept the game balanced in Dobosz, H (2419) – Zelcic, R (2563) Austria 2007.] 10...exd5 11.cxd5 Bf6 12.0-0 Re8 13.Ba3



Position after: 13.Ba3

Black now embarked on the pawn-grabbing sequence 13...Rxe2 14.Nxe2 Bxa1 15.Qxa1 Nxd5 in the correspondence game Stern, D (2575) –

Polaczek, R (2505) Sweden 1994, which continued 16.Rd1 Nac7 17.Rd2 Be6 18.Qd1 Qd7 19.Be4 Re8 20.h3 Nf6 21.Bc2 d5.



Position after: 21...d5

White visibly enjoyed enough compensation for his small material deficit, although perhaps not more, and that duel eventually ended peacefully.

8...0-0



Position after: 8...0-0

9.Be2

9.Bd3!? Na6 10.0-0

A) Here or even on the next move pushing 10...e5 made sense. This is perhaps the small drawback of 9.Bd3 compared to the more restrained 9.Be2: following ...e6-e5 and ...f7-f5 White would have to deal with the fork ...e5-e4.

B) 10...Nb4 11.Bb1 Bf6 Both sides had their chances in Landa, K (2563) – Polaczek, R (2426) playchess.com 2004.

9...exd5

9...Na6 10.0-0 Re8 11.Be3 Bf6 12.Nd4 exd5 13.cxd5 Nc7 14.Qb3



Position after: 14.Qb3

Black has chosen the less active c7-square for his horse in Kritz, L (2549) – Grunberg, M (2421) Triesen 2005, but from there it did put pressure on d5.

At this stage Black should have played 14...Bg5!,, [not 14...Bxd4? 15.Bxd4 Ncxd5 16.Nxd5 Nxd5 17.Bc4±].

10.cxd5



Position after: 10.cxd5

White can count on a small plus owing to his space advantage in this sort of positions.

Here you have two examples.

10...Bg4

10...N8d7 11.0-0 Nc5 12.Be3 Bf6 13.Nd4 Re8² Shabalov, A (2623) – Polaczek, R (2426) playchess.com 2004.

11.0-0 N8d7 12.Bf4 Re8²



Position after: 12...Re8²

Mrva, M (2345) – Velicka, P (2410) Prague 1992.

b) 6.d5 e5

1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.c4 Nb6 5.exd6 cxd6 6.d5 e5 7.Nc3 Be7



Position after: 7...Be7

We have come to almost an identical position to one reached in the following line of the Sicilian Sveshnikov, 1.e4 1...c5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 e5 6.Ndb5 d6 7.Nd5 Nxd5 8.exd5 Nb8 9.c4, except that

a pair of knights has not been swapped here. Since he benefits from a spatial advantage, this difference should tend to favor White, but he may find it harder to achieve the desirable c4-c5 break. At any rate, the position is double-edged and therefore suitable to play for a win (for both sides).

8.Bd3

A) 8.f4?! proved dubious in Shirov, A – Dubov, D Moscow (blitz) 2013, which continued 8...0-0 9.Nf3 Bg4 10.fxe5?! N8d7 11.b3 Bh4+ 12.Kd2.



Position after: 12.Kd2

Here, rather than 12...dxe5?∞ the natural 12...Nxe5μ would have secured Black a marked edge; he didn't even have to sacrifice anything to lure the enemy king to d2.

B) 8.Nf3 0-0 9.Be2 Bf5 [9...f5 and 9...a5 came into consideration] 10.0-0 N8d7 [10...Na6 would have left the d7-square free for the other knight and given Black the option of ...Nb4 in some variations] 11.b3



Position after: 11.b3

11...Nc5∞ Kriebel, T (2339) – Markos, J (2596) Zajezova 2011 [11...Bg6!? intending either ...f7-f5 or perhaps 12...e5-e4 and 13...Ne5, now that 13.Nd4 wouldn't gain a tempo on the bishop].

8...0-0 9.Nge2



Position after: 9.Nge2

9...f5

9...Na6 10.b3 f5 11.0-0 Bd7 12.f3 Rc8 [if 12...Bg5 then 13.f4!] 13.Be3 Nc5 14.Bc2 a5 15.Qd2² Landenbergue, C (2450) – Adams, M (2640) Garmisch Partenkirchen (rapid) 1994.

10.b3



Position after: 10.b3

10...a5

With this rare guest Black first cares about impeding his rival's play on the queenside before focusing on his own active operations on the other wing.

10...N8d7 11.0-0



Position after: 11.0-0

The main line, where Black has tried a variety of moves, the most popular but not necessarily the best being 11...Nc5.

A) 11...e4 is sufficient in practice to get a complicated battle, but maybe not to fully equalize. Here you see some sample lines. 12.Bc2

A1) 12...Ne5 13.Nd4 Bf6



Position after: 13...Bf6

A1.1) 14.f4 exf3 15.gxf3 Taking back with the pawn may appear strange, but White wants to expel the enemy knight from its nice outpost. 15...Ng6 16.f4 Nd7 [maybe 16...Re8 aiming to stop Re1/Be3/Nce2 is an improvement 17.Kh1 Nh4[∞]] 17.Kh1 Bxd4 18.Qxd4 Nf6 19.Ba3²



Position after: 19.Ba3²

This was Biti – Zelcic, Rabac open 2003, where clearly Black's play had not quite come off; White was better and went on to defeat his higher-rated opponent quite comfortably.

A1.2) 14.a4 Re8 15.Ba3 Nd3 [Or 15...a5 16.Ncb5 Nf7 and now 17.f3! is pretty strong.] 16.Nce2 Nd7 17.Bxd3 exd3 18.Qxd3



Position after: 18.Qxd3

White was better in the correspondence game Tiits, T (2560) – Hebels, A (2485) ICCF email 2009.

A1.3) 14.Nce2 g5?! [14...g6 Is more solid, but in a rapid internet game Black probably wanted to play a seemingly more offensive move!]
15.a4 Bd7 16.a5 Nc8 17.a6 bxa6 18.Rxa6± Vazquez, G (2527) – Nihal, S (2620) chess. com 2020.

A2) 12...Bf6



Position after: 12...Bf6

A2.1) 13.Be3 looks like the most natural method for White to me, and now maybe 13...Ne5∞ [in Grobelsek – Begovac, Velika Gorica 2003, Black introduced interesting complications with 13...f4!? giving Black some compensation for the pawn, but not quite enough in cybernetic terms following 14.Bxb6 Qxb6 15.Bxe4 Nc5 16.Rc1²].

A2.2) 13.f4 exf3 14.Rxf3 [14.gxf3 also makes sense.] 14...Ne5 15.Rf1 g6∞ Huschenbeth, N (2259) – Krasenkow, M (2651) Germany 2007.

B) 11...Nc5



Position after: 11...Nc5

12.Bc2 a5 13.f4 Bf6 [13...e4 seems to be a concession at this stage, but it may prove hard for Black to keep the tension for long] 14.Rb1 [or 14.fxe5 Bxe5 15.Be3²] 14...Bd7 15.Be3



Position after: 15.Be3

White had the better of it after 15...Rc8 16.Qd2² in Sadkowsky, D (2333) – Skulener, W (2391) Belgium 2007. Instead 15...Qe7 is worth investigating, whereas the impetuous 15...g5? is again too optimistic because of 16.fxe5 Bxe5 17.Bd4.

11.0-0 Na6 12.f4 Nd7 13.Be3 Ndc5 14.Bc2 Bf6 15.Rc1 Bd7 16.Kh1



Position after: 16.Kh1

This happened in Fossan, E (2340) – Agdestein, S (2595) Drammen 1994 and was fine for Black in my opinion.

16...Qe7

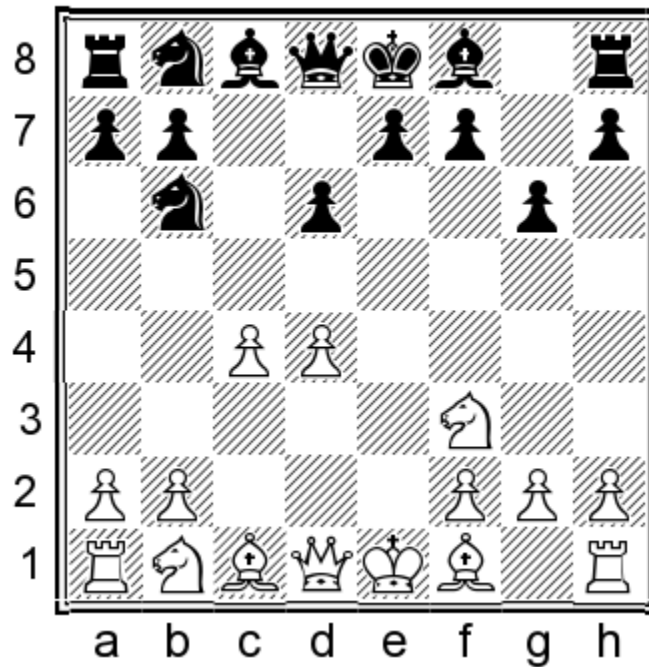
Now in place of the above move he could have tried 16...Nb4!?, intending 17.Bb1 e4 followed by a knight jump to d3. 17.fxe5 Bxe5 is another possibility, offering mutual chances.

Conclusion: After the hasty advance 6.d5 Black can save time, opt for 6...g6 and achieve an approximate equality following 7.Qd4 e5 8.dxe6 f6.

The other options, 6...N8d7, 6...e6 and especially 6...e5, are richer from a strategic point of view, and thus more suitable if you aim for a more complex game.

c) 6.Nf3 g6 7.--, 7.h3 Bg7 8.Nc3

1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.c4 Nb6 5.exd6 cxd6 6.Nf3 g6



Position after: 6...g6

It seems that after 5...cxd6 Black can, and probably should, continue automatically with 6...g6, 7...Bg7 and 8...0-0 for a start, whatever White does except for the straightforward aggression of 7.h4. After 6...g6 White has a variety of logical moves at his disposal, with many transpositions likely to happen.

7.h3

White rules out an eventual ...Bg4, which is not yet a “threat” but will soon be.

A) 7.a4 This could transpose into 1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.c4 Nb6 4.a4, see the relevant section. 7...Bg7 8.a5 N6d7 9.Nc3 0-0 10.Be2 Nc6 11.d5 Bxc3+ 12.bxc3 Nxa5 13.Bh6



Position after: 13.Bh6

13...b6!? [The machine says Black had enough resources to defend in the event of 13...Re8 14.h4 Nf6, but in a practical game sacrificing the exchange was rather wise.] 14.Bxf8 Qxf8 With a pawn and the better structure, Black had decent compensation in Illescas Cordoba, M (2605) – Rogers, I (2605) Salamanca 1998.

B) 7.Be2 Bg7 8.0-0 0-0 9.Nc3



Position after: 9.Nc3

B1) 9...Bg4 10.Be3 Nc6 11.b3



Position after: 11.b3

11...d5 And we are back to the main line. [11...e5?! is far less popular and objectively inferior too, as proved in Tiviakov, S (2520) – Hauchard, A (2420) Torcy 1991, which continued 12.dxe5 dxe5 13.c5².]

B2) The rare and provocative 9...Be6 makes sense too. Then after 10.Qb3 Black can renew the threat against the c4-pawn with 10...Qc8, while following 10.d5 Bg4 White has to deal with the possibility of ...Bxf3. The principled continuation therefore seems to be 10.b3 d5 11.c5



Position after: 11.c5

and now 11...N6d7 rather than 11...Nc8?!. Indeed, in that latter case White would likely opt for 12.h3, to prevent the customary follow-up ...Bg4xf3 followed by ...Nc6, ...e6 and ...N8e7-f5. After 11...N6d7 the horse will pursue its journey to f6 and possibly e4, giving Black his share of the chances. Now let's get back to the main line.

7...Bg7 8.Nc3



Position after: 8.Nc3

This should come to the same as 8.Be2 since I am skeptical about the merits of moving this knight to d2 later on. If White wants to try the interesting 9.Bg5, rather than 9.Be3, it is however smarter to begin with 8.Nc3 instead of 8.Be2 as White will probably follow up with a quick Qd2 and gain extra options, such as Rd1 and d5.

8...0-0 9.Be3

9.Bg5!?



Position after: 9.Bg5!?

Only 12 games out of 800 have ventured down this path, with 9.Be2 and 9.Be3 together representing about 750 occurrences.

A) 9...h6 10.Be3



Position after: 10.Be3

A1) The direct 10...e5 is, as often in this kind of position, a reliable option too.

A1.1) If 11.dxe5 dxe5 12.c5



Position after: 12.c5

Black could open the long diagonal with the pawn sacrifice 12...e4! and be close to full equality after either 13.Nxe4 Nd5 or 13.cxb6 exf3 14.Qxf3 axb6.

A1.2) The same statement of adequate black counterplay is true after 11.Be2 Nc6,,.

A1.3) 11.Qd2 Kh7



Position after: 11...Kh7

12.0-0-0 [The white king should be safe enough after this, and there is no guarantee he would feel happier in case of 12.Rd1!?, when White would still require Be2 and 0-0 to evacuate the monarch from the center.] 12...Nc6 [Allowing the trade of queens is fine, but if Black strives for a sharper fight there is 12...e4!? 13.Nh2 f5 or 13.Nxe4 d5©.] 13.dxe5 dxe5 14.Qxd8 Rxd8 15.Rxd8 Nxd8= Lopez Martinez, J (2550) – Spraggett, K (2588) San Sebastian 2008.

A2) 10...Nc6



Position after: 10...Nc6

A2.1) 11.Rc1 e5 12.dxe5 dxe5 13.Qxd8 [13.c5 e4!,,] 13...Rxd8 14.c5 Nd5 [14...Nd7 is a Voronezh where Black's extra move ...h7-h6 is very likely to be useful,] 15.Nxd5 Rxd5 16.Bc4 Rd8= Kaminski, M (2395) – Baburin, A (2550) Cappelle-la-Grande 1993.

A2.2) 11.Qd2 Kh7 This cautious move was played in Cicak, S (2530) – Rozentalis, E (2591) Warsaw 2006. [instead the active push 11...e5 may appear tempting, but the engine isn't impressed by the black compensation following 12.dxe5 dxe5 13.Bxh6 Qxd2+ 14.Bxd2 Bf5 15.0-0-0, though 15...Nb4 looks messy enough to be worth a practical try in my opinion] 12.d5



Position after: 12.d5

12...Nb8 [retreating isn't especially joyful, but 12...Nb4 attacks nothing and is thus suspicious; whereas 12...Ne5 13.Nxe5 dxe5 14.c5 secures White some initiative.] Now instead of the aggressive 13.h4 White could also have considered the calmer 13.Be2².

B) 9...Be6 10.d5 Bd7



Position after: 10...Bd7

B1) 11.Qd2 this occurred in Cicak, S – Fuks, B Germany 2006 and instead of the game move 11...a5 Kornev suggests 11...Qc7 12.b3 Bxc3 13.Qxc3 Nxd5 14.Qb2 Nf6.



Position after: 14...Nf6

The Russian GM rightly assesses this as OK for Black, who will follow up with ...Bc6 and ...Nbd7. If White recovers his pawn by means of Bxf6 he will have issues with his king still in the center. Otherwise he will undoubtedly enjoy pretty decent compensation for his missing pawn, but any result is possible.

B2) 11.Rc1 is in my view a more critical continuation than 11.Qd2. 11...h6 12.Be3



Position after: 12.Be3

Now Black has to decide whether to push his e-pawn forward one or two squares. 12...e5 [If 12...e6 13.Qd2 exd5 14.cxd5 we have reached original positions that need further tests. In the event of 13.dxe6 Bxe6 Black will on the other hand continue with the freeing 14...d6-d5 and get an easy game]. 13.Qd2 Kh7[∞].

C) 9...Nc6 10.Qd2



Position after: 10.Qd2

10...d5 [On 10...Bf5 the simple 11.d5² seizes space and the advantage, any temporary black activity being easily neutralized, e.g. 11...Nb4 12.Rc1 Rc8 13.b3.] 11.c5 Nc4 12.Bxc4 dxc4



Position after: 12...dxc4

A critical position for the assessment of 9.Bg5. Usually White's bishop stands at e3 in this kind of positions, protecting d4 which here is under fire.

C1) 13.d5 Nb4 14.0-0



Position after: 14.0-0

14...Nd3 We are following the encounter Eschert, U (2325) – Jankowiak, A (2351) Germany email 2017. [At this crossroads the alternatives 14...Re8 and 14...Bf5 are valid too, with a transposition into 13.Rd1 if White opts for 15.Rad1 in the latter case.] 15.Bh6 b6 16.Bxg7 Kxg7

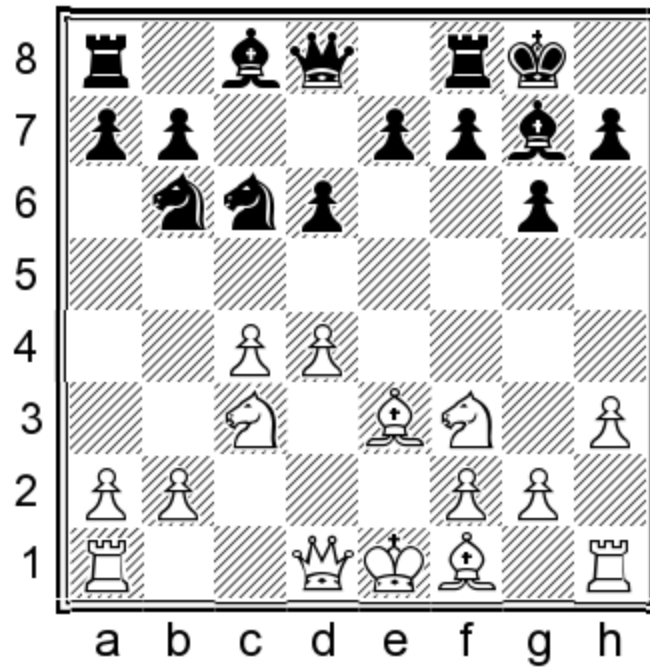


Position after: 16...Kxg7

17.b3 [17.c6 is more complicated but also looks promising for White following 17...e6 18.Ne1 Nb4 and now for instance 19.Qd4+².] 17...Nxc5 18.bxc4² White holds a small advantage.

C2) 13.Rd1 is a reasonable alternative, which also leads to a nebulous position: 13...Bf5 14.d5 Nb4 15.0-0 Bd3 or 15...Qa5[∞].

9...Nc6



Position after: 9...Nc6

10.Rc1

By quite a margin White's top choice here, with perhaps the most natural move, 10.Be2, occupying the second rank. The reason for that is that White wants to make a useful move instead of losing a tempo in the event of Black going ...d6-d5 and White answering it with c4-c5 ...Nc4 Bxc4 ...dxc4. This position is analyzed under 8.Be2.

10...e5

A) It is again possible to react by pushing the d-pawn: 10...d5 11.c5 Nc4 12.Bxc4 dxc4 13.0-0



Position after: 13.0-0

A1) 13...e5 14.d5! [14.Nb5 exd4 15.Nfxd4 Ne5, as in Merilo, H (2478) – Hugentobler, P (2466) ICCF corr 1999, was perhaps a bit better for White but less critical in my opinion. At any rate, Black held a draw there.] 14...Nb4 15.d6! [15.Qa4 Nxd5 is OK for Black.] 15...Nd3 16.Nd5! After this exchange sacrifice the machine likes White, and for good reason: the d6-pawn is a mighty passer and Black's pawn on c4 should fall soon. [16.Rb1 Given by C&K, this move is less clear than the sacrifice following 16...b6 17.cxb6 – or 17.b4 Bb7 18.Nd2 e4∞ – 17...axb6 18.b3 e4 or 18...f5 with a mess!]

A2) 13...b6

A2.1) 14.cxb6 (C&K) 14...axb6 15.Qe2 Ba6 [In the event of 15...Bb7!? 16.Qxc4 Na5 17.Qe2 Ba6 18.Nb5



Position after: 18.Nb5

Black has definite compensation for the pawn thanks to his bishops and the nasty pin on the b5-knight, but White is fine too.] 16.a3 Now 16...e6 looks better than 16...Na5?! and quite balanced.

A2.2) 14.Qa4 Nxd4 15.Bxd4 Bxd4



Position after: 15...Bxd4


16.c6 [Stronger than 16.cxb6?! Bxc3! 17.Rxc3 Qxb6 18.Rxc4 Qxb2 19.Rc7 Qf6³ Iuldachev, S (2456) – Xu, X (2585) Hamedan 2018.] 16...Bxc3 17.Rxc3 Be6= According to the engine, this position is about equal.

A3) 13...Bf5



Position after: 13...Bf5

I hope the reader will forgive me for the lengthy analysis that follows, but my point is to show that this line is very playable for Black despite the fact that his opponent didn't spend a tempo on Be2xc4, and thus has gained the free move Ra1-c1 in comparison with the related variation. 14.Qa4 [14.b3 Bd3 15.Re1 Nxd4 16.Nxd4 Bxd4 17.bxc4 – 17.Qf3!? – 17...Bxe3 18.Rxe3 Bxc4 19.Qxd8 Rfxd8 20.Rxe7= Gipslis, A – Mnatsakanian, E Moscow 1967] 14...e5 15.Rfd1 exd4 16.Nxd4 [16.Qxc4!? Be6! – or 16...d3!? – now 17.Qa4? is bad due to 17...Bd7!µ but 17.Qf1 keeps things unclear.] 16...Nxd4 17.Bxd4 Bxd4 18.Qxc4 Bxf2+ 19.Kxf2 Qg5 This is about equal since the white king isn't really vulnerable.

(14...Bd3 15.Rfd1 e5) 

Position after: 15...e5

In this position White can try either d4-d5 or d4xe5.

A3.1) 16.d5 Nd4 17.Ne1 [17.Nxd4?! is inferior because of 17...exd4 18.Rxd3 cxd3 19.Bxd4 b5! 20.Nxb5 (20.cxb6?? axb6 21.Qb4 Qh4–+ Bernal Tinajero, J – Menendez Rey, F (2200) Gijon 2000) 20...Qxd5³] 17...b5 18.cxb6 [18.Nxb5 Ne2+ 19.Kh1 Nxc1 20.Rxc1 f5∞] 18...axb6 19.Qb4 Bf5! 20.Qxc4 Rc8©

A3.2) 16.dxe5 Nxe5 [Here or on the next move Black can (and probably should) also try 16...Qe8!?, as in Pytel, K – Gipslis, A Lublin 1969, with the idea of following up with ...Nxe5 only after that move.] 17.Ne1 Re8 18.b3 Qb8



Position after: 18...Qb8

19.Nxd3? [We are following Nezar, M (2375) – Bauer, C (2636) Nancy 2005, where I was lucky my opponent and friend didn't find 19.Nb5! a6 20.Nd6 b5 21.Qa5 and White has gained a neat edge, contrary to what

happened in the actual game.] 19...Nxd3 20.Rb1 Rxe3! Decisive.

21.fxe3 Qe5 The white position has collapsed like a house of cards.

B) 10...Bf5 11.b3 d5 12.c5 Nc8 13.Be2 Be4 14.0-0 Bxf3 15.Bxf3 e6 16.b4 a6 17.Ne2 N8e7 18.g4



Position after: 18.g4

18...f5 [Perhaps 18...Qd7 or even 18...h5 was safer, in order not to weaken the e6-pawn.] 19.Nf4 Qd7 20.g5 Nxb4 21.Rb1© Borkowski, F (2350) – Suba, M (2450) Poland 1976.

After 10...e5 White has a choice.



Position after: 10...e5

11.dxe5

A) 11.d5 Ne7 [11...Nd4!? is available too. With his king still stuck in the middle, it is unlikely that White could just pinch a pawn for free here.]

12.Be2 Nf5 13.Bg5



Position after: 13.Bg5

A1) 13...f6! 14.Bd2 Re8 15.Bd3 [15.Ne4 Nd4!³ with an imminent ...f6-f5 to follow] At this stage the easiest way to get a complex battle consists in 15...Nh6 followed by ...Nf7 and ...f6-f5, but a daring pawn sacrifice also exists: 15...e4!? 16.Nxe4 Ng3 17.fxf3 f5 18.Bg5 Qc7 19.Be2 Rxe4∞.

A2) 13...Bf6?! A poor decision. 14.Bxf6 Qxf6 15.Ne4²



Position after: 15.Ne4²

Serper, G (2575) – Yermolinsky, A (2590) Tilburg (rapid) 1994. White enjoyed a pleasant lasting plus and he eventually brought home the full point.

B) 11.Be2 Now the interesting 11...Bf5 was the subject of Bednarski, J – Timman, J Amsterdam 1970, but Black can also equalize at once by means of either 11...d5 or 11...exd4 12.Nxd4 d5.

11...dxe5

After 11.dxe5 Black has to make up his mind between the double-edged move above and the simpler 11...Nxe5 12.Nxe5 Bxe5 13.Be2 Be6 14.b3 d5 with comfortable equality in Serper, G (2575) – Yermolinsky, A (2590) Tilburg (rapid) 1994.

12.c5

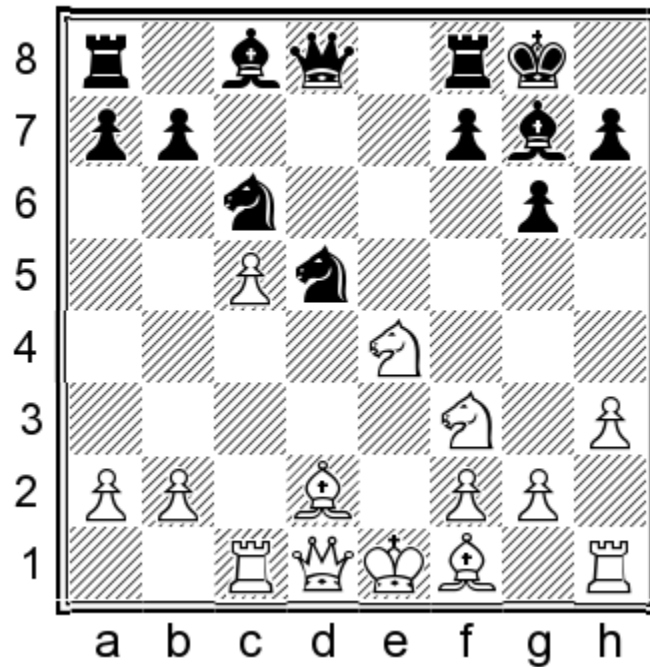


Position after: 12.c5

12...Nd7

The coming half-dozen moves have already been played. They aren't strictly speaking forced, but are quite logical.

12...e4!? 13.Nxe4 Nd5 14.Bg5 Qa5+ 15.Bd2 Qd8



Position after: 15...Qd8

Apparently White now has to decide between a repetition of moves or carrying on the fight with 16.Be2 Bxb2 ∞ .

13.Bc4 Qa5



Position after: 13...Qa5

This position can also arise in the Voronezh with b3 instead of h3. The difference is that Black is not threatening ...e4 as the c3-knight is not hanging, so White has time for his next move.

14.a3 e4 15.Nd2 Nxc5 16.b4 Qxa3 17.Bxc5 Bxc3 18.Bxf8 Kxf8



Position after: 18...Kxf8

Now either **19.b5** or **19.0-0 Qxb4 20.Nxe4** could be a bit better for White.

d) 6.Nf3 g6 7.h3 Bg7 8.Be2

**1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.c4 Nb6 5.exd6 cxd6 6.Nf3 g6 7.h3 Bg7 8.Be2
0-0**



Position after: 8...0-0

9.Nc3

9.0-0 We have reached a fairly standard position for the line 5.exd6 cxd6 6.Nf3, but there remains some scope for originality. While I don't really see, in the event of 9...Bf5, how to sensibly avoid a transposition into known territory following 10.Nc3 Nc6, White could answer another typical move, namely 9...e5, with 10.Bg5 as in Voekler, B – Lutz, KJ Germany 2007. Then, after 10...f6 11.Bh4!? – instead of that game's continuation 11.Be3 – there appears an untried and rather balanced position. 9...Nc6 10.d5 [10.Bg5!?] Hitting the knight at once isn't the most common follow-up, which is also why I wanted to provide you with the following example.



Position after: 10.d5

10...Ne5 [With the inclusion of 10.Nc3 Bf5 the reply 10...Na5?! would have been adequate, but here 11.Na3! followed by 12.Rb1 is irritating since both b2-b4 and Bd2 are looming.] 11.Nxe5 Bxe5 12.a4 a5 I would say that most of the time stopping a4-a5 with ...a7-a5 would be right for Black, and the current case is no exception. 13.Nc3 Bg7 [13...e6 and especially the maneuver 13...Nd7 also made sense.] 14.Nb5 Bd7 15.Ra2 Bxb5 16.axb5 Nd7 17.Be3 Nc5 18.Qc2 b6



Position after: 18...b6

Tabatabaei, M (2629) – Tristan, L (2535) chess.com 2020. The black position will be a hard nut to crack, but on the other hand the second player may struggle to generate active play of his own.

9...Nc6

Black can also opt for 9...Be6!? with the idea of inciting d4-d5.



Position after: 9...Be6!?

A) 10.b3 seems less testing than 10.d5 (see variation B). 10...d5 11.c5 N6d7 12.Bb2 The bishop may not feel at ease there later on, but Black was threatening ...Nxc5 [and 12.b4? ran into 12...a5]. 12...Nf6 13.0-0 Nc6 14.a3 Ne4 15.b4 a6 16.Na4 Qc7 17.Re1 f5∞ Polard, G (2267) – Chabanon, J (2446) Saint-Quentin 2019.

B) 10.d5 Bd7



Position after: 10...Bd7

B1) White could also address the threat of ...Qc7 by means of 11.Bd2 e5 [11...Qc7?! 12.b3] 12.0-0 f5 [12...Na6 could be an improvement] 13.a4 a5 14.Nb5 Nc8 [14...e4!?] 15.c5 dxc5 16.Qb3 Bxb5 17.Bxb5 Nd6 18.Ng5©.



Position after: 18.Ng5©

Rosche, E (2505) – Kleinert, S (2549) Remote email 2014. White obviously has ample compensation for a pawn.

B2) 11.0-0 Qc7 12.Re1 Re8 13.Qb3 Na6 14.Be3 Nc5 15.Qc2 Nba4 16.Bd4 Nxc3 17.Qxc3² Kunz, H (2315) – Pavlov, V (2420) ICCF email 2014.



Position after: 17.Qxc3²

Once again, White's space advantage is the telling factor.

10.0-0 Bf5

10...e5 looks a bit worse given the fact that White has not committed his dark-squared bishop to e3. 11.Bg5! f6 12.Be3 f5 13.dxe5 dxe5 14.c5 The endgame deriving from 14...Qxd1 15.Raxd1 Nd7 16.Ng5! offers White a pleasant edge.



Position after: 10...Bf5

11.Re1

A) 11.Bf4!? could be a small subtlety compared to the usual 11.Be3: if Black now goes 11...d5 he won't hit the dark-squared bishop after 12.c5 Nc4. 11...e5 12.Bg5 Qd7 13.dxe5



Position after: 13.dxe5

A1) After the inferior 13...Nxe5 14.Nxe5 Bxe5 15.Rc1² Miettinen, K (2423) – Mer, A (2346) ICCF email 2015, Black won't be able to easily get rid of his backward d-pawn, as he often does in similar situations. 15...Bxh3? 16.f4 Bxc3 17.Rxc3 Bf5 18.Bh6±

A2) 13...dxe5! 14.c5



Position after: 14.c5

A2.1) 14...h6!?

A2.2) 14...Qxd1 15.Rfxd1 Nd7 16.Be3 Nd4 17.Nxd4 exd4 18.Bxd4 Bxd4 19.Rxd4 Nxc5 Kornev rates this as equal, but White may claim a little something after either 20.Rad1 or 20.g4.

A2.3) 14...e4 15.Nh4 Bxc3 16.bxc3 Nd5



Position after: 16...Nd5

We are following the correspondence game Teeriaho, T (2398) – Rain, R (2253) ICCF email 2014, which continued 17.Qe1 [17.Qc1!?] 17...Be6 18.c4 Nde7 [on 18...Ndb4 the same 19.Bf6! would have been strong] 19.Bf6 Rfd8 [19...h6!? in order to have 20...Kh7 available in case of 20.Qc1] 20.Rd1 Qc7 21.Rxd8+ Qxd8 22.Qc1 Qf8 23.Qf4² White has the upper hand.

B) 11.d5 Na5 12.Nd4 Naxc4 13.Nxf5 gxf5[∞]



Position after: 13...gxf5[∞]

Nandhidhaa, P (2365) – Cornette, D (2400) chess.com 2020. White has decent compensation for the sacrificed pawn, in the form of the two bishops and Black's damaged pawn structure.

C) 11.Be3 d5



Position after: 11...d5

C1) The main line goes 12.c5 Nc4

C1.1) Obviously the retreat 13.Bc1 does not enable White to fight for an opening edge. 13...b6 [13...e5!?] 14.b3?



Position after: 14.b3?

Black left his opponent unpunished for his mistake in Efimenko, Z (2643) – Bortnyk, O (2533) Wroclaw (blitz) 2014. Instead of the game continuation of 14...N4a5?, 14...bxc5! 15.bxc4 cxd4 would have been quite delicate to handle for White.

C1.2) 13.Bxc4 dxc4 Espig, L (2425) – Pribyl, J (2415) Leipzig 1983. This is Nezar – Bauer seen previously except that White is missing the tempo Ra1-c1, so Black must be completely fine here.

C2) 12.b3!? White is ready to accept hanging pawns in order to try for an opening edge. This brave decision will undoubtedly give Black his share of play, but in the resulting complex middlegame anything can happen. 12...dxc4 [12...e5?! 13.c5²] 13.bxc4 Na5 14.c5



Position after: 14.c5

14...Nbc4! [14...Nd5 15.Nxd5 Qxd5 16.Qa4² White will play Rfd1/Rac1, and possibly Bc4 if the knight goes back to c6.] 15.Bf4! White hopes to prove that the enemy knights are hanging to a greater extent than the white pawns. [15.Qa4 Bd7 16.Qb4 Nxe3 17.fxe3 b6 must be fine for Black.] 15...b6 [15...Qd7!? looks like a nice developing move.]



Position after: 15...b6

16.Bxc4 [16.Rc1 was a worthy option as well, while after 16.c6 Rc8 17.c7 Rxc7 18.Bxc7 Qxc7 the two bishops, a pawn and White's isolated d-pawn mean that Black has sufficient compensation for the exchange.] 16...Nxc4 17.Qe2 bxc5!? A very ambitious novelty, in the dynamic spirit of the Alekhine Defense. [in the few games in which 17...Na5!? was played, Black did not experience big opening problems either.] 18.Qxc4 cxd4 19.Ne2 Rc8 20.Qa6



Position after: 20.Qa6

Black has the bishop pair and a mobile pawn center. It seems that his compensation is entirely adequate. 20...d3 [Maybe he should not hurry to retrieve part of the material; the centralizing 20...Qd5!?© offers long-term compensation.] 21.Ng3 Bxa1 Now, instead of the recapture 22.Rxa1?!, as played in Kobalia, M (2672) – Savchenko, B (2616) Aix les Bains 2011, White should have preferred 22.Nxf5! Bf6 [or 22...gxf5 23.Rxa1² leaving the king's position weakened] 23.Nh6+ Kh8 24.Rd1².



Position after: 24.Rd1²

The d3-pawn is in danger and White has annoying kingside pressure.

D) 11.Bg5!? h6 12.Be3 d5 13.b3 dxc4 14.bxc4 e5



Position after: 14...e5

D1) 15.Nxe5 Nxe5 16.dxe5 Qxd1?! [16...Bxe5!=] 17.Rfxd1 Bxe5 18.Rac1² Inarkiev, E (2683) – Brunner, L (2448) Eilat 2012.

D2) Another attempt consists of 15.d5 Na5 16.c5 e4 [16...Nbc4!?] 17.Nd4 Nxd5 18.Nxd5 Qxd5 19.Nxf5 Qxf5 20.Rb1©.

We have reached another important juncture, where Black has to make up his mind between three relevant options.

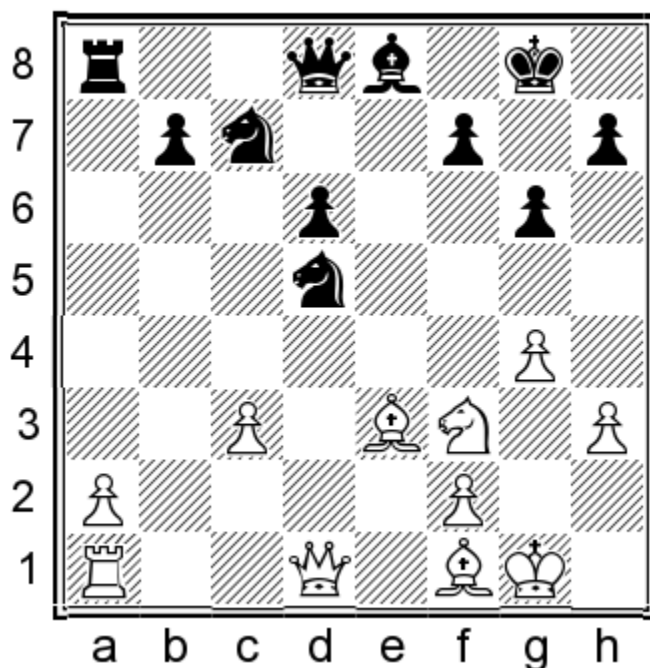


Position after: 11.Re1

Here you have some illustrations of them.

11...Nb4

A) 11...Re8 12.Bf1 Rc8 13.g4 All other constructive moves have their drawbacks, so time for action! If White is somewhat weakening his own position, pushing the enemy minor pieces back to d7 and a8 is certainly an achievement, and while the coming moves are not mandatory, they appear quite logical to me. 13...Bd7 14.c5 Na8 15.Be3 Nc7 16.d5 Nb4 17.cxd6 exd6 18.Bxa7 Ra8 19.Rxe8+ Bxe8 20.Be3 Bxc3 21.bxc3 Nbx d5∞



Position after: 21...Nbx d5∞

Morozov, D (2376) – Rain, R (2253) ICCF email 2014. Both sides have their weaknesses, and something like ...Bc6 followed by ...Ne6 and perhaps a jump to f4 should compensate for the disappearance of Black's dark-squared bishop.

B) 11...Rc8 12.Bf1 Now 12.g4, here or after the insertion of 12.a3 h6 like in the correspondence duel Chukanov, I – Pavlov, V ICCF email 2015, is quite sensible too. 12...e5 13.Bg5 Qd7 14.dxe5 dxe5 15.c5 Qxd1 16.Raxd1 Nd7 17.Nd5 e4 18.Bb5



Position after: 18.Bb5

This occurred in Mishin, A (2330) – Pavlov, V (2417) ICCF email 2014, and since White stood slightly better after 18...Rfe8 19.Bxc6 Rxc6 20.b4, maybe Black should have tried 18...exf3 19.Bxc6 Rxc6 20.Ne7+ Kh8 21.Nxc6 bxc6 22.g4 Be6, when White can take at once on e6 or first play 23.Be7²/=.

12.g4 Be6 13.Qb3 Na6 14.a4 Rc8



Position after: 14...Rc8

Black can't step back anymore, and if you dislike the position after move 20 you'd better pick another move rather than 11...Nb4.

15.a5 Nxc4 16.d5 Bxc3 17.Bxc4 Bxd5 18.Bxd5 Bxe1 19.Nxe1 e6 20.Bg2 Nc5[∞]



Position after: 20...Nc5[∞]

Zidu, J (2533) – Nogler, S (2412) Remote email 2013.

e) 6.Nf3 g6 7.Nc3

1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.c4 Nb6 5.exd6 cxd6 6.Nf3 g6 7.Nc3 Bg7



Position after: 7...Bg7

8.Be3

As one move earlier, pushing 8.a4 is likely to transpose into 1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.c4 Nb6 4.a4, covered elsewhere. 8...a5 [8...0-0!?] 9.Be2 0-0 10.0-0 Nc6 11.Be3



Position after: 11.Be3

This happened in Oleksiyenko, M (2585) – Gumularz, S (2513) chess.com 2020, where after 11...Bf5 White could have gained the upper hand by means of 12.d5!?. Instead I prefer 11...d5 or 11...Bg4, when in the latter case 12.b3 can be met by ...d5, while after 12.c5 the reply 12...Bxf3 13.Bxf3 dxc5 14.dxc5 Nc4 is fully adequate.

8...Bg4

8...0-0 is a much more common move order but this should come to the same thing.

9.b3 Nc6 10.Be2 d5 11.c5 Nc8 12.0-0 0-0



Position after: 12...0-0

This standard position has been debated quite a few times with the overall assessment that Black has nothing to fear from a theoretical point of view. It may derive from other lines or move orders, sometimes with small nuances. The black side is fairly solid, healthy and easy to handle: Black wants to continue ...Bxf3 Bxf3 ...e6, and then reroute his idle knight from c8 to f5 in order to put maximum pressure on the enemy d-pawn.

13.a3

This is a superfluous precaution in comparison with the immediate 13.b4, but all in all it changes very little.

A) 13.b4



Position after: 13.b4

A1) Pawn-grabbing with 13...Nxb4?! would merely activate the enemy rook and give White a protected passed pawn, but still things are not so simple. 14.Rb1 Nc6 15.Rxb7 Bxf3 16.Bxf3 e6



Position after: 16...e6

The machine believes White stands a bit better, which may well be true. Black can, however, soon challenge the b-file and the thematic jumps ...Nc6–a5–c4 and ...N8e7-f5 are on the cards, which won't leave him without counterplay.

A2) 13...a6 14.Rb1 e6 15.a4 N8e7 16.b5 axb5 17.axb5 Na5



Position after: 17...Na5

18.Ne5 [18.Bf4?! Bxf3 19.Bxf3 Raja, H (2437) – Erigaisi, A (2526) Xingtai 2019 and now rather than 19...Nc4, 19...Nf5! 20.Ne2 Nh4 21.Qd3 Nc4³ would have been more pleasant for Black.] 18...Bxe2 19.Nxe2 Bxe5 20.dxe5 Nc4 21.Bg5 Qc7 22.Bf6 Qxc5 23.Qc1 Rfe8 24.Ng3 Nf5 25.Nxf5 exf5[∞]



Position after: 25...exf5[∞]

Sukhov, N (2418) – Van Seben, E (2243) IECG email 2005. The absence of a dark-squared bishop in Black's camp is a bit scary, but the knight is strong and Black has an extra pawn.

B) After 13.h3 Bxf3 14.Bxf3 e6 15.b4 a6 16.Rb1 N8e7 17.g4 f5³



Position after: 17...f5³

Black was threatening ...f5-f4 and had seized the initiative in the rapid game Potapov, P (2479) – Zvjaginsev, V (2643) St Petersburg 2017.

C) 13.Ne1!? Bxe2 14.Nxe2 b6 [Starting with 14...e6 looks a bit safer, first asking White what he can oppose to the maneuver ...N8e7-f5, but Black possibly wanted to get rid of the c5-pawn to give his knight access to d6.] 15.Rc1 e6 16.Qd2 bxc5 17.Rxc5 Qb6∞



Position after: 17...Qb6∞

Huebner, R (2620) – Timman, J (2630) Candidates match, Sarajevo 1991. The structure is better for Black, d4 notably being a constant target, but White may be able to generate play on the queenside.

13...e6 14.b4 a6



Position after: 14...a6

15.Qd2

15.Ne1 Bxe2 16.Nxe2 N8e7= with the usual idea to continue 17...Nf5. Black was fine in Andriasian, Z (2586) – Mikaelyan, A (2500) Yerevan 2018.

15...N8e7 16.Rfd1 Bxf3 17.Bxf3 Nf5 18.Ne2 Re8 19.g3 Nxe3 20.fxe3 Qg5,,



Position after: 20...Qg5,,

Zhu, Jiner – Nakamura, H chess.com (rapid) 2019.

Conclusion: in this section, after both sides have fully and sensibly mobilized their pieces, we have seen many possible means of counterplay for Black. He can initiate some action with ...d6-d5 or ...e7-e5, while sometimes he can just continue developing first, with ...Bc8-f5 and then perhaps ...Rc8. Some nuances exist if White plays Ra1-c1 prior to Bf1-e2, for instance, or if he provokes his opponent by Bc1-g5 in place of the common Bc1-e3, but overall Black more or less gets equality or an unclear game everywhere.

f) 6.Nc3 g6 7.Bd3

1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.c4 Nb6 5.exd6 cxd6 6.Nc3 g6 7.Bd3 Bg7 8.Nge2



Position after: 8.Nge2

This setup, the same one that White may use against the recapture 5...exd6, has proven in the current case less appropriate for stopping Black from generating early counterplay. The reason for that probably lies in the asymmetrical pawn structure here, which already creates an imbalance, and the fact that in answer to a later ...e7-e5 the reply d4-d5 would not “calm down” Black, as it does if he goes ...c7-c5 after having earlier recaptured 5...exd6.

8...0-0

Starting with 8...0-0 prior to developing the queen’s knight or taking any central decision seems natural to me. That being said, I see nothing wrong with the immediate 8...Nc6 9.d5!? This position was reached in Mikhalchishin, A – Krizsany, L Kecskemet 1991 and is important because

Black now committed an inaccuracy, as pointed out by C&K. [9.Be3 will likely transpose into 8...0-0 9.0-0 Nc6 10.Be3.]



Position after: 9.d5!?

9...Ne5?! This looks very logical, as the knight has more options on e5 than it would on b4 [But 9...Nb4! Is the correct move. The explanation is that Black will need to undermine the white d-pawn with ...e7-e6, to which his opponent will react by dxe6. Then, after ...Bxe6, the horse proves more useful on b4 than on e5 to support Black's next advance, ...d6-d5. See 8...0-0 9.Be3 Nc6 10.d5 if you are not convinced!] 10.b3 Bg4 Maybe Black reckoned he was the side with less space and aimed at exchanging two sets of pieces instead of only one. Anyway, after 11.Bb2 he was slightly worse in the above-mentioned game. 10...0-0 was a better try in my opinion, whereas after 10...e6 11.dxe6 Bxe6 12.Be4² White would have kept an enduring small pull.

9.Be3

The bishop move and 9.0-0 will most probably come to the same thing if Black continues ...Nc6, see the note to 8...0-0. Here you have some examples of the obvious alternatives based on central pawn pushes.



Position after: 9.0-0

A) 9...d5 10.c5 N6d7 [Although not plainly bad, 10...Nc4?! feels wrong here as it doesn't hit a bishop on e3.] 11.Bg5 [11.Nxd5?! allows instant equalization thanks to 11...Nxc5.] 11...h6 12.Be3 [12.Bh4!?] 12...Nc6 13.Bb5 Nf6



Position after: 13...Nf6

14.Qd2 [14.f3² was also a bit better for White in Spraggett, K (2580) – Nataf, I (2410) Enghien-les-Bains 1997.] 14...Kh7 [Black wouldn't have solved his little opening problems tactically with 14...Ng4 since 15.Bf4 Nxd4 16.Nxd4 e5 17.Rad1 remains slightly in White's favor according to the engine, although that may not be evident to the human eye.] 15.Rad1², Lupu, M (2458) – Gozzoli, Y (2287) Marseille 2001.

B) 9...e5 10.d5



Position after: 10.d5

10...Na6 [or 10...f5 at once, as in Grima Crespo, E (2335) – Galje, H (2345) ICCF corr 1996, which continued 11.b3 Na6 12.Ba3 Nc5 13.Bc2 Bd7 14.Re1 Rc8 15.Qd2 e4 16.Rad1 Be5 with potentially serious threats on the kingside] 11.Be3 Bd7 12.Rc1 Rc8 13.b3 Nc5 14.f3 f5 15.Qd2 Qf6 16.Bb1 Amanov, Z – Gledura, B chess.com (blitz) 2020. According to the machine White stands a bit better here, but obviously this position is quite double-edged.

9...Nc6

9...d5!? 10.c5



Position after: 10.c5

10...N6d7 [The sequence 10...Nc4 11.Bxc4 dxc4 12.0-0 Bf5 may occur in similar lines and give Black a pretty decent game, but here White may claim a little pressure following 13.b3 Bd3 14.bxc4 Bxc4 15.Rb1².] 11.0-0 [11.Nxd5 Nxc5=] 11...Nc6



Position after: 11...Nc6

In comparison with the lines seen under 9.0-0 d5 10.c5 N6d7 and so on, White doesn't win a tempo by hitting h6 when he sets the battery Be3-Qd2. This certainly improves Black's chances to equalize.

A) 12.Qa4?! e5= Abergel, T (2426) – Miralles, G (2485) Asnieres-sur-Seine 2006.

B) 12.Bb5 Nf6 13.f3 Bd7 [13...Ne8!? with the idea of ...Nc7.] 14.Rc1 [Maybe the immediate 14.Qd2 was a tad stronger.] 14...Re8 15.Qd2 e5 16.Rfd1 e4 17.fxe4



Position after: 17.fxe4

A draw was agreed there in Motwani, P (2490) – Gluckman, D (2370) Yerevan 1996, probably because the belligerents had concluded (correctly) that Black was doing OK after 17...Nxe4 18.Nxe4 Rxe4 19.Nc3 Re8∞.

C) 12.Qd2

C1) 12...e5 was worth considering but not totally satisfactory in view of the irritating 13.Bg5. 13...Qa5 [13...f6?! looks worse: 14.Be3 f5 15.Bg5!] 14.b4!



Position after: 14.b4!

This surprising move gives White the upper hand in a complex position, after either 14...Nxb4 15.Nxd5 Nc6 or 14...Qxb4 15.Rab1 Qa5 16.Rb5 Qa3 17.Nxd5.

C2) 12...Nxc5 13.dxc5 d4 14.Nxd4 Nxd4

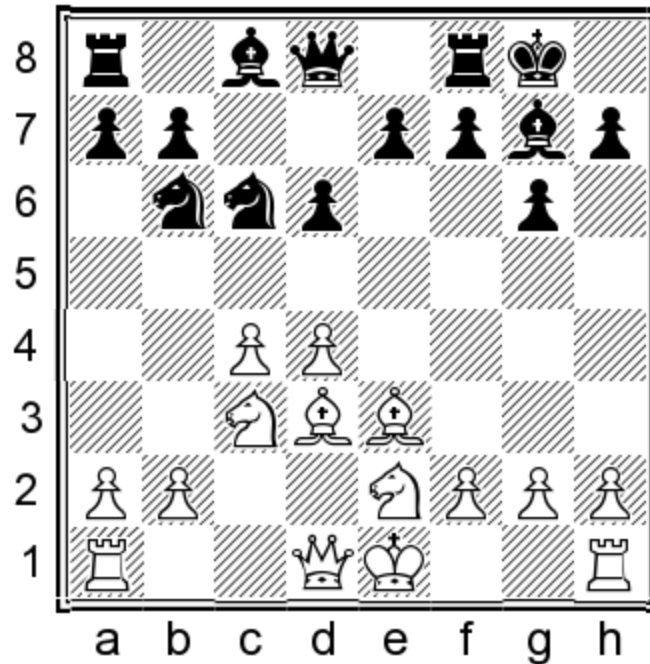


Position after: 14...Nxd4

Franzen, J (2365) – Bagirov, V (2505) Stary Smokovec 1981. Now, and though I'm not fully convinced, the machine sees a small edge for White

after 15.Rad1².

After 9...Nc6 we arrive at a crossroads.



Position after: 9...Nc6

10.0-0

A) 10.Rc1 Nb4 [As usual, 10...e5 and 10...d5 are available..] 11.b3 Black now eliminated the bishop in the old game Saunders, H – Colle, E Scarborough 1928, but as we know by now 11...Nxd3+ 12.Qxd3 is a bit better for White.

B) 10.d5 Nb4! [10...Ne5?! – see the note to 8...Nc6 9.d5 and so on 11.b3 Nxd3+ 12.Qxd3² Donev, I (2420) – Novkovic, M (2400) Vorarlberg 1998.] 11.b3 e6 12.dxe6 Bxe6³



Position after: 12...Bxe6³

Here the difference with having the knight on e5 becomes crystal-clear:
White can't prevent ...d6-d5 with 13.Be4 and Black is already for choice.
13.0-0 d5! 14.Bc5 [14.c5? loses on the spot to 14...d4+] 14...Nxd3
15.Bxf8 Nxf2 16.Rxf2 Qxf8

10...e5

Kornev's recommendation.

10...Bg4!? 11.f3 Bf5



Position after: 11...Bf5

12.b3 [12.Bxf5 Nxc4 13.Bf2 gxf5 14.b3 Nb6 15.d5 Ne5 16.Qd2] 12...Bxd3 13.Qxd3 d5 14.c5 Nc8 15.Rab1 e6 16.b4 Kamsky, G (2713) – Schulze, A (2226) Mainz (rapid) 2010 is balanced after 16...N8e7 or 16...a6, as Black chose in that game.

11.d5



Position after: 11.d5

11...Nb4!

11...Ne7?! 12.b3 [12.f3 here or on the next move also deserves attention] 12...Nd7 13.Ne4 Fischer, R – Berliner, H New York 1960.

12.b3 Nxd3 13.Qxd3 f5 14.f4 Nd7

The critical position for this line, where White has a wide range of options.
14...e4?! I am not a fan of this move, which surrenders the d4-square and leaves White with easy play. 15.Qd2 Nd7 16.Rab1 a6 17.Rfc1 b6 18.b4

Muzyka, N (2477) – Marcinkiewicz, A (2370) ICCF email 2000.



Position after: 14...Nd7

15.Rab1

The prophylactic 15.Kh1!? as played in Mikhalchishin, A (2530) – Rogulj, B (2435) Bled 1992, also makes sense, and so does immediately releasing the central tension: 15.fxe5 Nxe5 16.Qd2 Bd7 17.Kh1 Ng4 18.Bd4 Qh4 19.h3 Ne5∞ Finkelstein, J (2322) – Rawlings, A (2348) ICCF email 2001.

15...g5 16.fxg5 f4 17.Bf2 Qxg5 18.Ne4 Qg6 19.N2c3 Kh8

19...Nf6!?

20.Nb5

This may well be a bit dubious in view of what follows.

20...f3 21.g3 Nf6 22.Nbxd6 Nxe4 23.Nxe4 Rf4 24.Nc5 Bf5³



Position after: 24...Bf5³

Valverde Toresano, A (2291) – Cunningham, R (2415) IECG email 1996, although White held the draw.

g) 6.Nc3 g6 7.Be3 Bg7 8.--, 8.Rc1 Nc6

1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.c4 Nb6 5.exd6 cxd6 6.Nc3



Position after: 6.Nc3

6...g6

While this section deals with the white alternatives to 8.Rc1 and then 9.b3 I shall briefly speak of 6...Nc6. If White continues (or tries to) with 7.Be3 followed by 8.Rc1, play is likely to transpose into a line of the Voronezh covered later in this chapter, where Black has committed himself to the inferior 9...Nc6 (compared to 9...e5 or 9...Bf5). [Instead, 7.d5 Ne5, as in Rodriguez Guerrero, E – Movsziszian, K, Navalmoral 2004, is valid too. White should be slightly better after 8.f4 or 8.a4, since in both cases the c4-pawn is immune, meaning he can count on a pleasant space advantage; Black can in turn deviate after 7.Be3 with either 7...e5 or 7...Bf5 but in my view he gets worse positions than after 6...g6. The push d4-d5 is always in the air and the simple developing setup Nf3, Be2 followed by 0-0 also looks easily better for White.]

7.Be3 Bg7



Position after: 7...Bg7

8.Rc1

About 3000 games out of 4000 follow this path and the rate is even a bit higher when the opponents have more than 2300 Elo average.

A) 8.h4!? This makes sense but it is very unclear which side will benefit from the inclusion of h2-h4 and ...h7-h5. Thus 8...h5!



Position after: 8...h5!

A1) 9.Qb3 Nc6 10.Rd1 Now rather than 10...0-0 11.Be2, Kurajica, B (2525) – Bagirov, V (2490) Banja Luka 1976, Kornev suggests trying to

provoke a weakening in White's camp by mean of 10...Bg4 11.f3 [or 11.Be2 Qc8!] 11...Bd7 12.c5 Nc8∞, which leads to unclear play.

A2) 9.Nh3 Nc6 [9...0-0!? 10.Ng5 d5 was a valuable alternative.] 10.Ng5 Bf5 11.Be2 d5



Position after: 11...d5

We are following Dolezal, R (2368) – Fedorov, E (2239) Prague 2018, where despite the final result the outcome of the opening was favorable to Black, who should in fact have postponed this thematic thrust by one move, and rather opted for 11...0-0! instead. 12.c5?! [12.cxd5 was the right answer, when 12...Nxd5? 13.Qb3 is catastrophic for Black. He should therefore go 12...Nb4 13.Bb5+ Bd7 14.d6 with reciprocal chances.] 12...Nc4 13.Bxc4 dxc4³



Position after: 13...dxc4³

The d4-pawn is under attack and if 14.d5 then 14...Ne5 is more than fine for Black.

A3) 9.Nf3 Bg4 10.Qd2 Bxf3 11.gxf3 Nc6 12.0-0-0 d5 [Perhaps first 12...0-0 was more accurate, and then possibly ...e7-e6.] 13.c5 Nc8



Position after: 13...Nc8

Black got a nice game after 14.Kb1?! e6 in the recent encounter Banzea, A (2368) – Ninov, D (2242) Graz 2020, but the more resolute 14.f4 e6 15.f5! would have been more demanding.

B) 8.c5 dxc5 9.dxc5



Position after: 9.dxc5

9...N6d7 [9...Bxc3+?! 10.bxc3 Qxd1+ 11.Rxd1 N6d7 12.Nf3 these trades led to a favorable endgame for White in Sveshnikov, E (2489) – Gal, M (2150) Marianske Lazne 2016.] 10.Qd2 Nc6 11.Rd1 0-0 12.Nf3 Qa5 13.Nd5

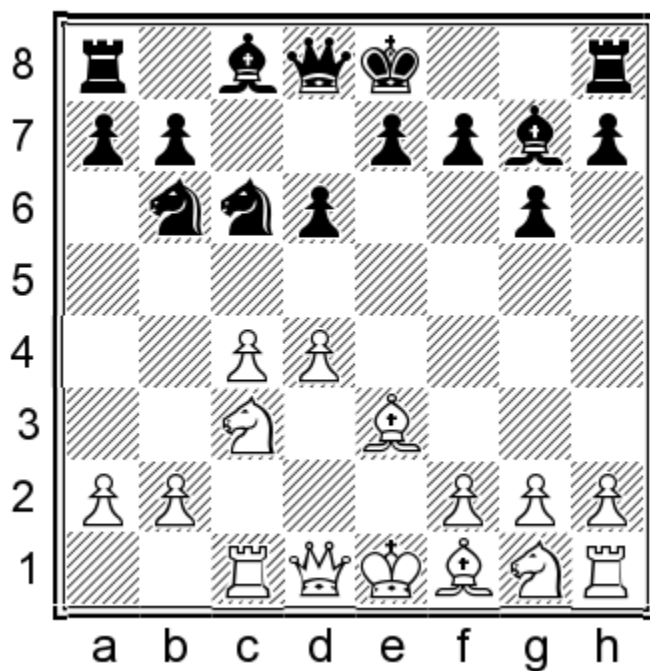


Position after: 13.Nd5

Now both 13...Qxa2 and 13...Qxd2+ 14.Rxd2 Nf6 are at least OK for Black.

Here I recommend 8...0-0 (see the following subchapters).

8...Nc6



Position after: 8...Nc6

9.d5!

White is best advised to immediately question his opponent's knight by means of this move if he wants to keep things under control.

Instead 9.b3 has been his choice much more frequently, but that allows 9...d5 10.c5 and now the energetic novelty 10...e5! leads to a fairly chaotic game.



Position after: 10...e5!

White might still emerge with a slight plus from the complications but this line is much more complex, as the following examples show.

A) 11.Nb5 exd4 and now both 12.Nd6+ Kf8 13.Bf4 Nd7 and 12.Bf4 0-0 13.cxb6 Re8+ 14.Be2 axb6 are hard to assess. At any rate, for a minor material investment Black seems to be the one having all the fun!

B) 11.dxe5 d4 12.cxb6 axb6∞

C) 11.Nge2 Nd7 [11...Bg4!?] 12.Nxd5 0-0 White is a pawn up but he still needs some moves to get his king to safety, while the opening of the center is imminent.

9...Ne5



Position after: 9...Ne5

10.Be2

This calm developing move is the approved way to get a stable plus for White.

The interesting 10.f4!? should give Black more opportunities to gain counterplay. 10...Ng4 11.Bd4 Nf6 [11...0-0!?] 12.Nf3 0-0 13.Be2 e6! 14.dxe6 Bxe6 15.b3



Position after: 15.b3

This position was reached in Akopian, V (2625) – Minasian, A (2565) Yerevan 1995, where rather than 15...Nc8 16.0-0 Ne7 17.Ng5², Black should likely have preferred 15...d5 16.c5 Nc8!,, followed by the same 17...Ne7 as in the game.

10...0-0 11.b3²



Position after: 11.b3²

We have come to an important juncture where Black has tried several moves but they all have failed to earn him parity.

11...e6

A) 11...f5?! This push softens the e6-square without getting much in return. In most cases Black will need to push his e-pawn in the near future, and after dxe6 Bxe6 he won't achieve the thematic ...d6-d5 break under favorable circumstances. 12.f4



Position after: 12.f4

By far the main continuation even though I also give ^(to the line)12.Qd2 as ² with the move order 9...f5 10.Qd2 Nc6 11.d5 Ne5 12.Be2.

A1) 12...Nf7 is no improvement. 13.Nf3

A1.1) 13...Nd7 14.0-0 Nf6± White has scored 10/13 from this position but the average level of the players isn't too high. Except for a badly-placed knight on f7 it isn't clear what Black has achieved over the last half-dozen moves.

A1.2) 13...e5 14.dxe6 Bxe6 15.0-0 Re8 16.Bd4±



Position after: 16.Bd4±

Bokros, A (2479) – Henriksson, S (2145) Oropesa del Mar 2000. Black is positionally worse; his attempt to get rid of the backward d-pawn by ...d6-d5 will be met by the thematic c4-c5, which under the present circumstances clearly favors White.

A2) 12...Ng4



Position after: 12...Ng4

A2.1) 13.Bd4 e5 14.dxe6 Bxe6 15.Bxg4 [15.Nf3! with a clear white plus is even stronger.] 15...Bxd4 16.Qxd4 fxg4 17.Nge2 Qh4+ 18.Ng3± Azarov, S (2582) – Bernadskiy, V (2529) Lvov 2017. Black has nothing to counterbalance his structural defects.

A2.2) 13.Bxg4 also suffices to claim an enduring edge. 13...fxg4 14.Nge2 e5 [14...Nd7 15.0-0 Nf6 16.Nd4



Position after: 16.Nd4

This move, underlining the weaknesses along the e-file, gave White a neat edge in the recent encounter Neiksans, A (2559) – Smorodinskis, I (2209) Riga 2019.] 15.dxe6 Bxe6 16.0-0 Qe7 17.Qd2 Rae8 18.Bd4 Bd7



Position after: 18...Bd7

19.Bxg7?! [19.Rce1! with a clear advantage.] 19...Kxg7 White remained better in Nataf, I (2565) – Hjartarson, J (2628) Reykjavik 2004 but his legendary opponent eventually held.

B) 11...h5 White doesn't need to do anything crazy after his opponent has self-weakened himself this way.



Position after: 11...h5

The three sensible continuations that follow all give him a lasting plus.

B1) 12.Nf3 e6 13.Nxe5 Bxe5 14.dxe6 Bxe6 15.Bf3 Durarbayli, V (2596) – Shabalov, A (2533) Philadelphia 2016. Black had nothing in return for his backward d-pawn, although losing in only seven more moves wasn't compulsory.

B2) 12.f4 Ng4 13.Bd4² Bh6?! 14.Nh3! Howell, J (2525) – Trifunovic, A (2230) Hastings 1995.

B3) 12.h3 e6 13.Nf3 [13.dxe6?! Bxe6 followed by 14...d6-d5 equalizes] 13...exd5 and now both recaptures 14.cxd5 and 14.Nxd5 are ². Trying to deviate by means of 13...Nxf3+?! looks worse since after 14.Bxf3 e5 15.c5 dxc5, and now 16.0-0 rather than 16.Bxc5, White is faster with his play.

C) 11...Re8 12.f4 [12.Nf3!?] 12...Ned7 13.Nf3



Position after: 13.Nf3

13...Nf6! [This move is more accurate than 13...e5?! 14.dxe6 Rxe6 15.Bf2±. Here we see a worse version of what happened in the game because if Black doesn't have anything concrete and direct, he really wants to recapture on e6 with his bishop.] 14.0-0 e6 15.dxe6 Bxe6 16.Qd2 We are following Naiditsch, A – Feygin, M Essen 2002. [Or 16.Bd4, when 16...Bd7 17.Qd2 Bc6² was another way to handle the position besides ...d6-d5.] 16...d5 17.c5



Position after: 17.c5

17...Nbd7 [The engine suggests that forcing matters via 17...Ne4 18.Nxe4 dxe4 would have remained better for White after 19.Nd4 Nd5 20.Nxe6 fxe6 21.Rc4!.] At this stage, rather than 18.b4?! White should have preferred 18.Bb5!².

12.f4 Ned7 13.dxe6 Qe7

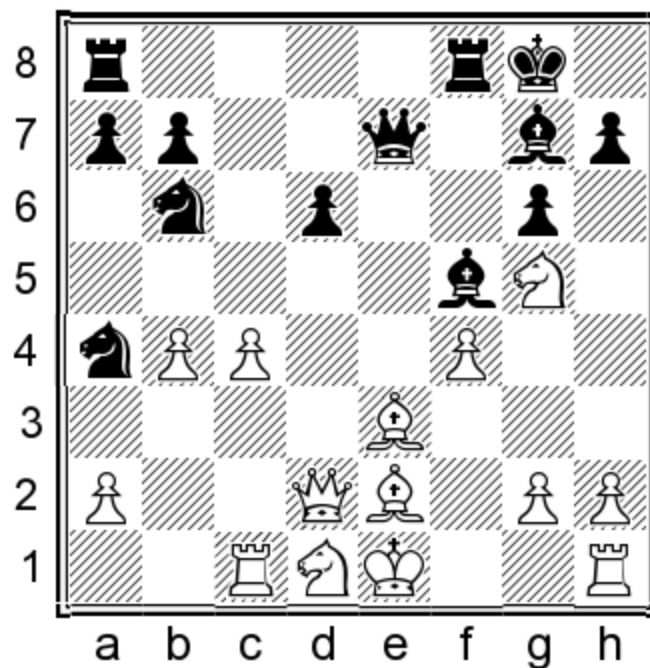


Position after: 13...Qe7

Black's point, but it fails to gain him equality.

14.Nb5

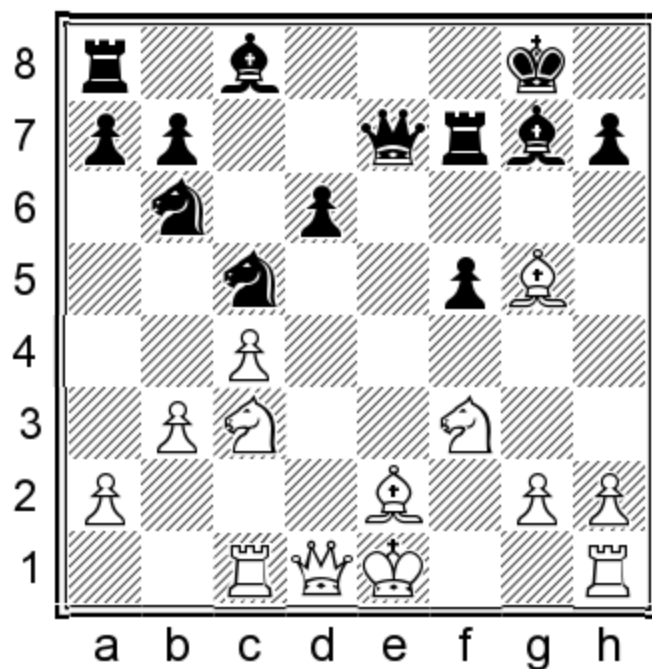
A) 14.exf7+ Rxf7 15.Qd2 Nc5 16.Nf3 Bf5 [16...Bg4 17.0-0± Horvath, A (2412) – Sikula, V (2292) Hungary 1999] 17.Ng5 [17.0-0 Bxc3 18.Qxc3 Nd3 19.Qd4 Nxc1 20.Bxc1 Re8∞] 17...Rff8 18.b4 Nca4 19.Nd1



Position after: 19.Nd1

19...Rad8 [19...Rae8 20.0-0 Bb2 21.Nxb2 Qxe3+ 22.Qxe3 Rxe3 23.Nxa4 Nxa4 24.Rfe1²] 20.0-0 d5 21.cxd5 h6 22.Nf3 Be4©

B) 14.Nf3 Nc5 15.f5! gxf5 16.exf7+ Rxf7 17.Bg5



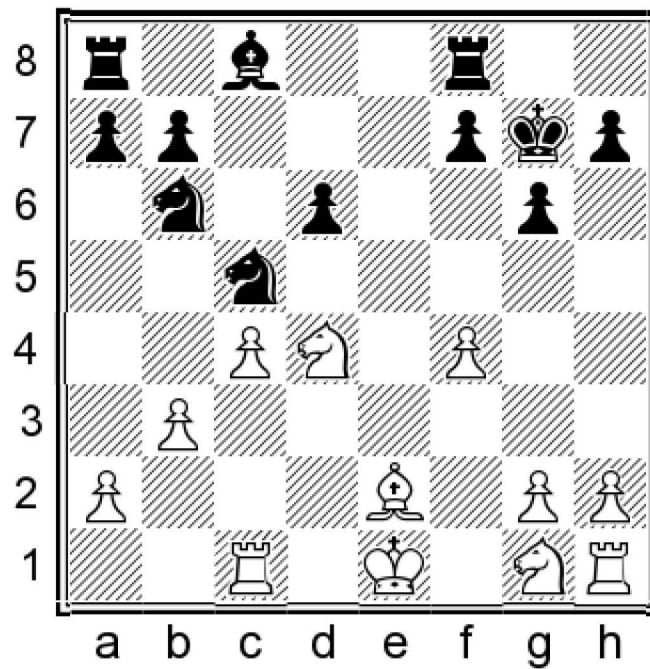
Position after: 17.Bg5

17...Qe8 [17...Qe6 18.Bf4 Ne4 19.Nxe4 fxe4 20.Ng5 Qf5±] 18.Nb5± 1-0
(58) Altounian, L (2427) – Khachiyan, M (2473) Costa Mesa 2003.

14...Qxe6 15.Bd4 Qe4 16.Bxg7

16.Nf3 Qxf4∞

16...Kxg7 17.Qd4+ Qxd4 18.Nxd4 Nc5=



Position after: 18...Nc5=

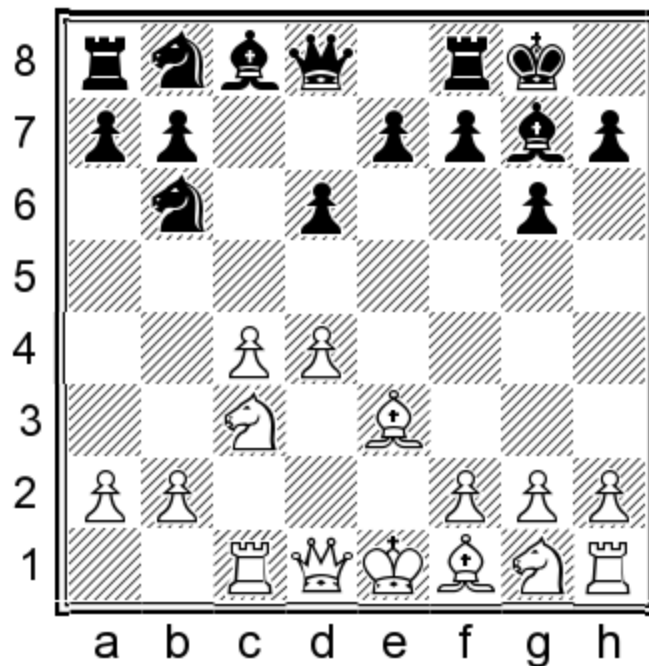
The position was equal in Mitkov, N (2470) – Baburin, A (2545) Yerevan 1996.

(back to the text) By far the main continuation even though I also give 12.Qd2 as ²

with the move order 9...f5 10.Qd2 Nc6 11.d5 Ne5 12.Be2.

h) 6.Nc3 g6 7.Be3 Bg7 8.Rc1 0-0 9.--, 9.b3 --

1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.c4 Nb6 5.exd6 cxd6 6.Nc3 g6 7.Be3 Bg7 8.Rc1 0-0

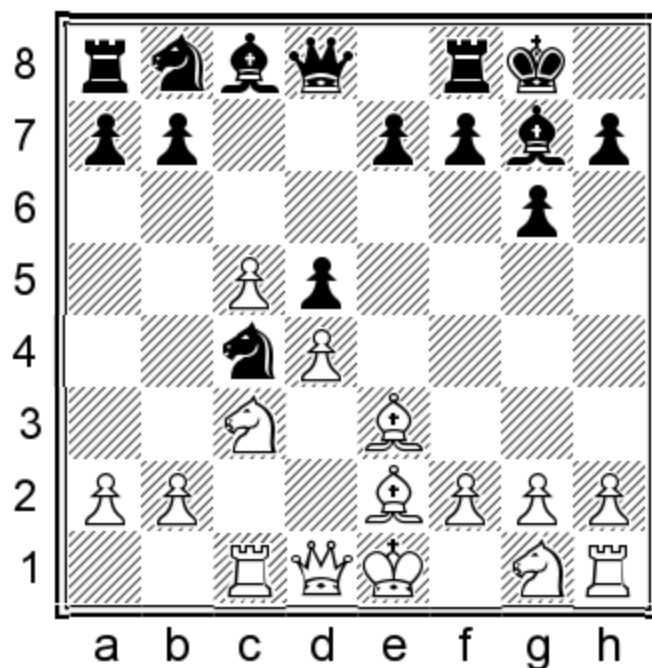


Position after: 8...0-0

9.b3

A) 9.h4? now comes too late to deserve the “!?” mark. Indeed, 8.Rc1 has neither really helped White’s development, nor boosted his potential kingside assault. As a consequence, natural moves by Black will leave his opponent struggling to hold his position together. 9...d5 10.c5 Nc4 11.Bxc4 dxc4 or 9...Nc6 10.h5 and now both 10...e5 11.d5 Nd4 and 10...d5 11.hxg6 hxg6 are quite good for Black, whose central play is faster than White’s wing action.

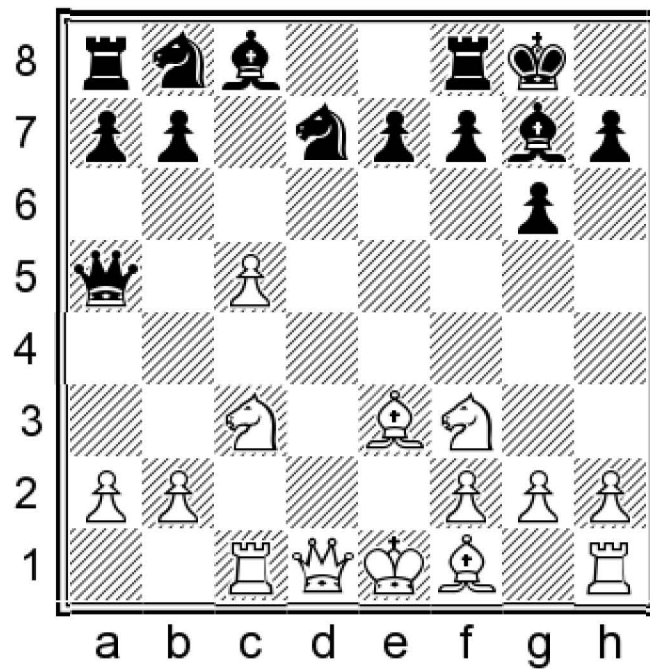
B) 9.Be2?! is known to be inaccurate but still occurs occasionally, especially at fast time-controls. Black equalizes with the energetic 9...d5! 10.c5 Nc4



Position after: 10...Nc4

11.Bxc4 dxc4= Harikrishna, P (2730) – Mohammad, N (2437) chess.com 2019. Even worse is 11.Nxd5? Nxe3 12.Nxe3 Bxd4 and Black takes over.

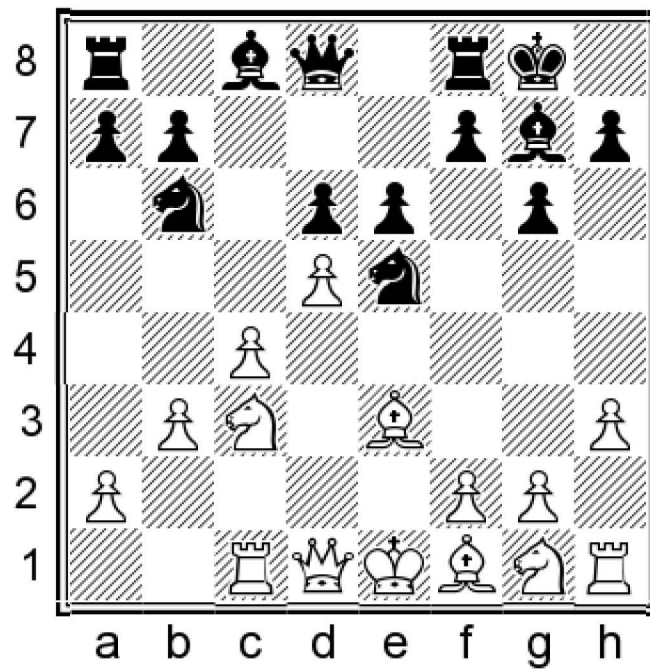
C) White should not rush with 9.c5?!, like in Skripchenko, A (2456) – Gvetadze, S (2337) Moscow 2010, a mistake which was possibly due to the fact that it was a blitz game. 9...dxc5 10.dxc5 N6d7 11.Nf3 Qa5



Position after: 11...Qa5

This may still be acceptable for White, but clearly the second player has easy play here since the c5-pawn needs constant protection, an opinion I share with Kornev.

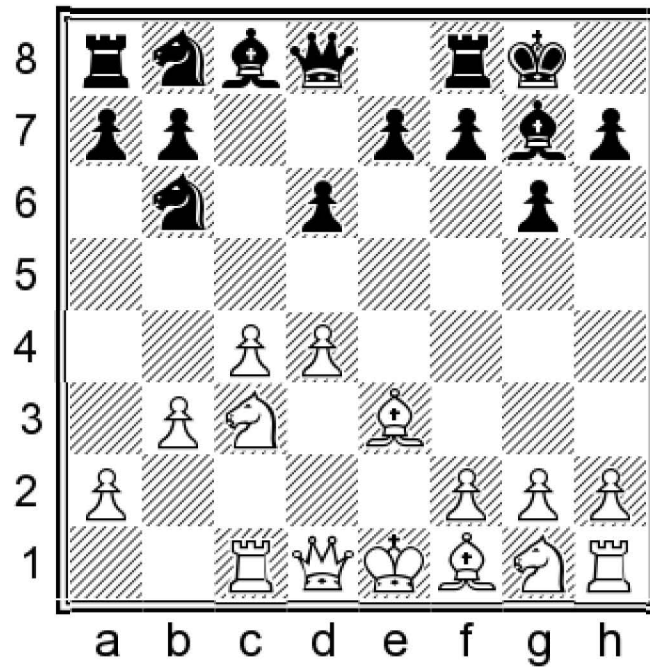
D) 9.h3 is too slow for White to hope for any advantage. 9...Nc6 10.d5 Otherwise 10...d5 or 10...e5 will follow. 10...Ne5 11.b3 e6,,



Position after: 11...e6,,

The same position with the white bishop at e2 in place of his pawn at h3 could be slightly better for White due to 12.f4. This push, however, runs into 12...Qh4+ here.

Let's return to 9.b3.



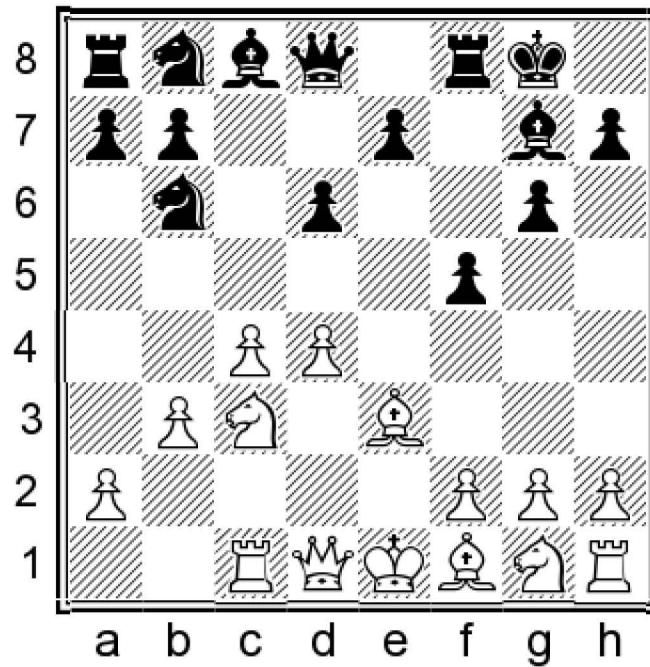
Position after: 9.b3

Kornev reckons that 9...e5 is Black's only way to fight for equality, not even mentioning the alternatives. Although offering a repertoire implies making choices, since covering every single line isn't possible, I find it a bit harsh because many other black options do make sense.

9...Bf5

This will be "our" move, but before we focus our attention on it let's examine the alternatives. Note that 9...e5 is covered in the Bonus Lines chapter.

A) 9...f5?!

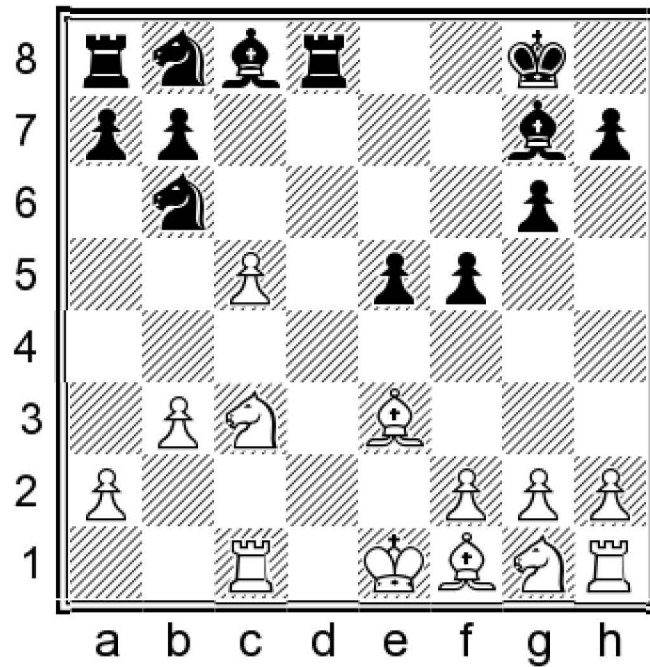


Position after: 9...f5?!

This somewhat dubious thrust has been experimented with a few times by GM Alex Shabalov. It may look interesting because Black has the immediate threat of ...f5-f4, and in the event of his achieving ...e7-e5 the pawn duo e5 and f5 could provide counterplay. Scrutiny reveals, however, than any sensible move other than 10.f4 (Black would reply 10...e5!) should give White some edge.

A1) 10.Qd2

A1.1) 10...e5?! 11.dxe5 dxe5 12.Qxd8 Rxd8 13.c5

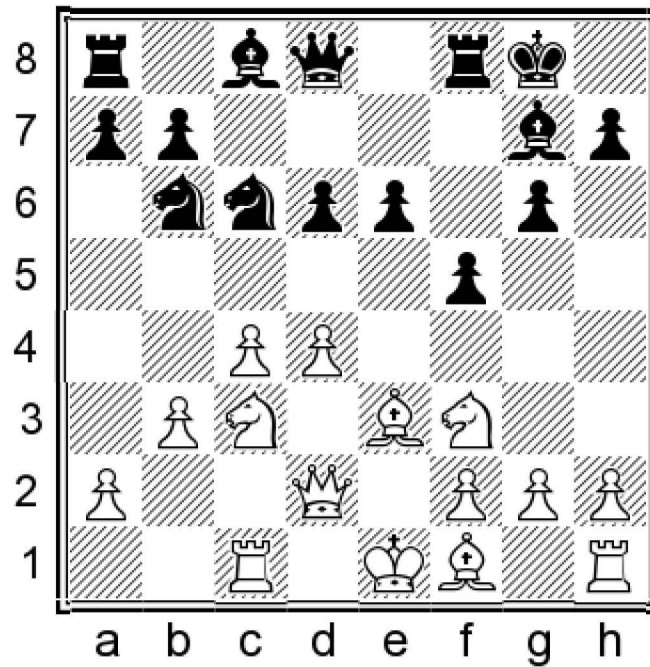


Position after: 13.c5

Black has the extra move ...f7-f5 compared to the tabiya of the Voronezh line, but this tells against him here. 13...N6d7 14.Bc4+ Kh8 15.Nb5 followed by Nd6, with a clear advantage for White.

A1.2) White should meet 10...Nc6 with 11.d5! Ne5 12.Be2². This transposes into a line we examine under 8...c6, but for which the most frequent move-order is 8...0-0 9.b3 Nc6 10.d5 Ne5 and so on. If you look at the related section you'll see that White hasn't/ couldn't enter the main line in the present case, but nonetheless he stands a bit better.

A1.3) 10...e6 11.Nf3 Nc6



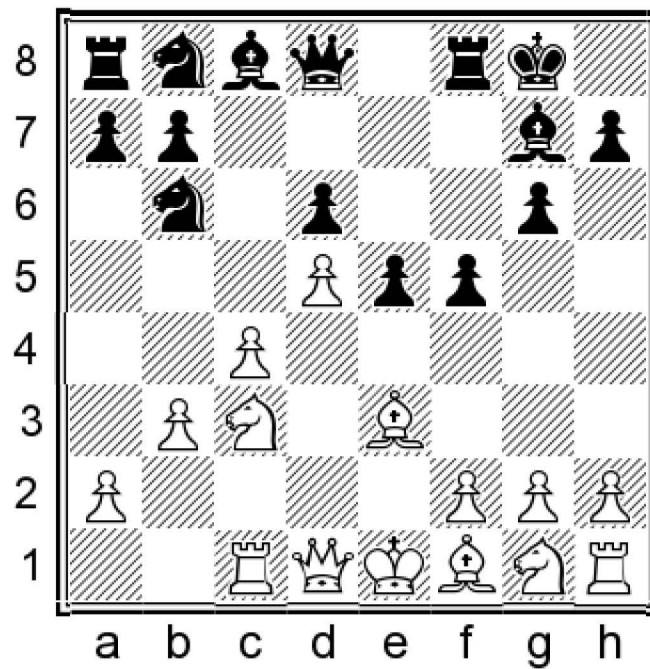
Position after: 11...Nc6

At this point 12.Bg5 brought White victory in Sevian, S (2401) – Shabalov, A (2529) Mashantucket 2014 [the alternatives 12.Be2 e5 13.Bg5! and 12.h4 were equally good].

A2) 10.g3 occurred in the rapid game Fressinet, L (2638) – Beudaert, X (2339), Bordeaux 2005, where Black played 10...Kh8?! [he should have preferred 10...Nc6 11.d5 Ne5 which, however, remains in White's favor after 12.h3² stopping ...Ng4].

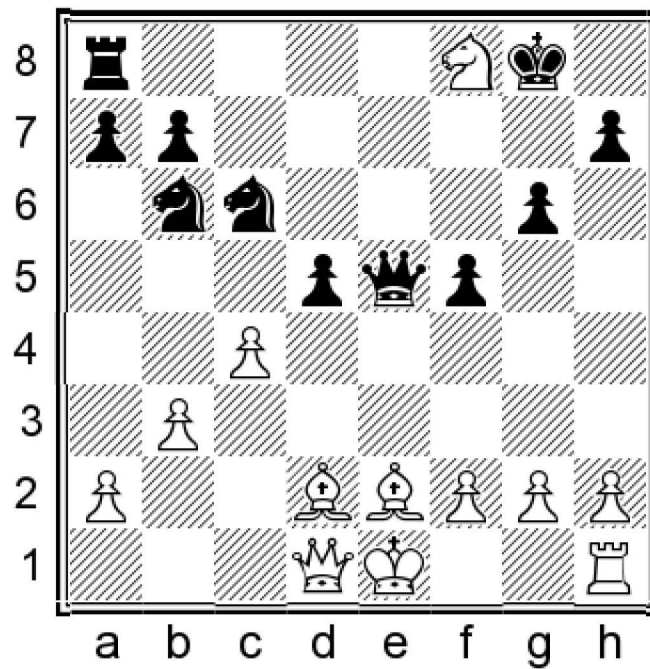
A3) White is behind in development and for that reason 10.d5?! is too slow compared to similar positions where the d-pawn would hit a knight on c6.

A3.1) 10...e5



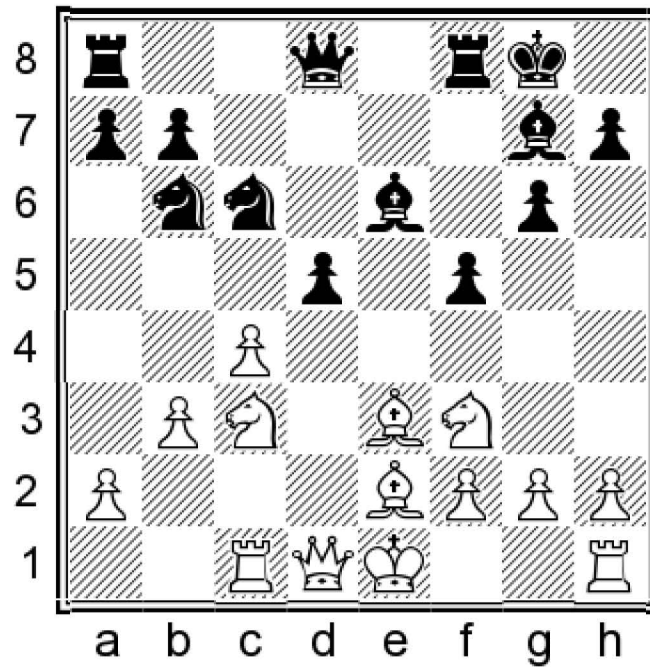
Position after: 10...e5

The same position as after 9...e5 10.d5 f5, albeit with a huge difference: White can take en passant here! 11.dxe6! Bxe6 [11...f4! transposes into 10...f4 and represents the cleanest equalizer]. 12.Nf3 [12.Nh3 Nc6 13.Be2 d5 14.Nf4 Bxc3+ 15.Rxc3 Qf6 16.Nxe6 Qxc3+ 17.Bd2 Qe5 18.Nxf8



Position after: 18.Nxf8

White is somewhat better owing to his pair of bishops.] 12...Nc6 13.Be2
 [13.Nd4 Bf7 14.Be2 occurred in Maltsevskaya, A (2271) –
 Goryachkina, A (2478) Sochi 2017, when 14...d5 15.c5 Nd7 would
 have been balanced.] 13...d5



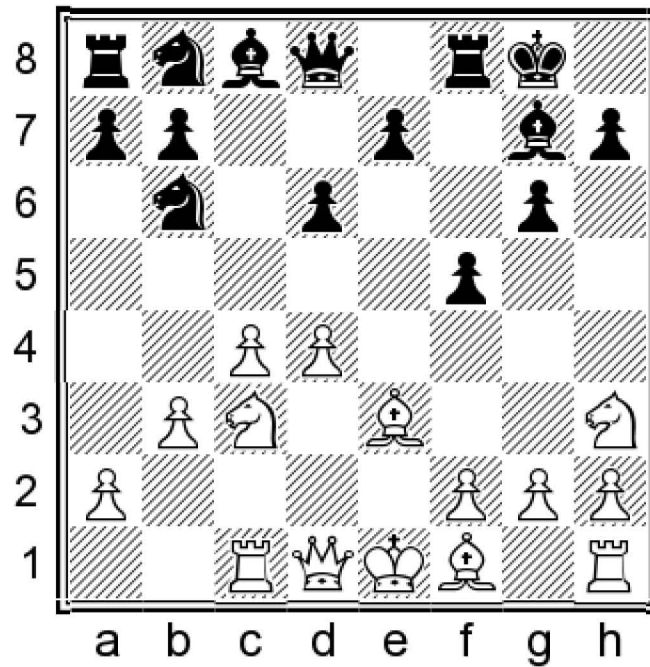
Position after: 13...d5

White should now refrain from 14.c5? Zahilas, L – Krecak, Z (2422) ICCF email 2000, because of 14...d4!³. Instead 14.Ng5 is likely to join the main line 12.Nh3 Nc6 and so on, while the simplifying 14.Nxd5 is adequate as well.

A3.2) 10...f4 11.Bd4 e5 12.dxe6 Bxd4 13.Qxd4 Bxe6 14.Nf3 Nc6 15.Qd2 Qe7 16.Be2 d5! 17.cxd5 Rad8 18.0-0 Nxd5= ½-½ Sheremetieva, M (2330) – Bollengier, A (2244) Sovata 2001.

A4) 10.Nh3

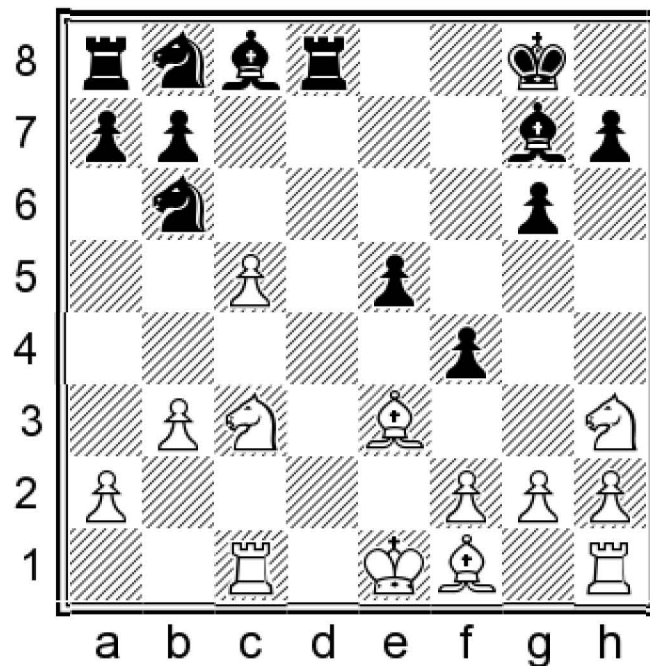
After 10.Nh3 Black has a couple of options.



Position after: 10.Nh3

A4.1) 10...Nc6 11.d5 Ne5 12.Be2 Fedorowicz, J – Shabalov, A Tulsa 2008. Play has transposed into a line seen under 8...Nc6 where Ng1-h3 has superseded the more popular f2-f4. White stands better here too.

A4.2) In case of 10...e5 the insertion of Nh3 and ...f5 suits White well compared to the famous Voronezh endgame. 11.dxe5 dxe5 12.Qxd8 Rxd8 13.c5 f4

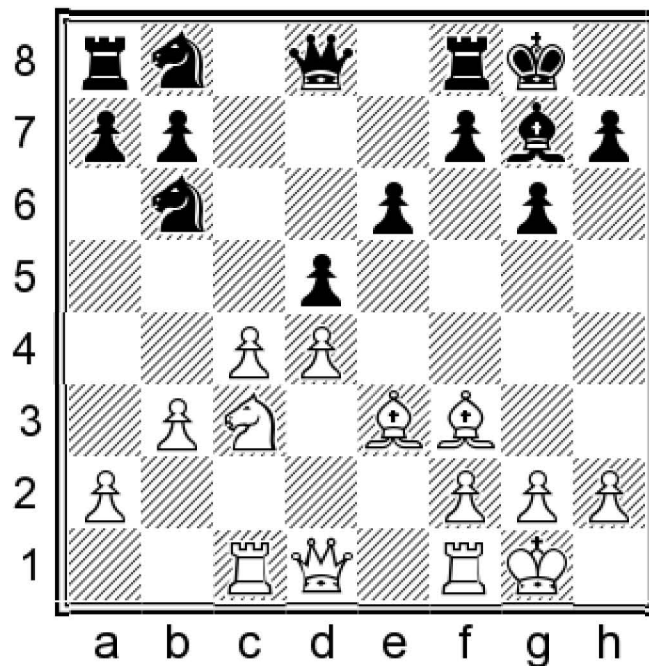


Position after: 13...f4

Forced, otherwise Bc4+ followed by Ng5 would cause serious damage. White can now opt for a slight plus with 14.Bd2 Bxh3 15.gxh3 or embark on the promising sequence that follows: 14.cxb6 fxe3 15.Bc4+ Kh8 16.Ng5 exf2+ 17.Kxf2 Rf8+ 18.Nf7+ Kg8 19.Ke1. White stands much better, but is this winning with perfect play?

A4.3) 10...h6 This was Black's try in Malisauskas, V (2510) – Kupreichik, V (2545) Moscow 1994, where in place of 11.f4?! White could have chosen one of two stronger continuations, namely 11.Qd2 g5 12.f4 and 11.c5 dxc5 12.dxc5 Bxc3+ 13.Rxc3 Qxd1+ 14.Kxd1 Nd5 15.Bc4 Be6 16.Bxd5 Bxd5 17.Bxh6, with a consequent edge in both cases.

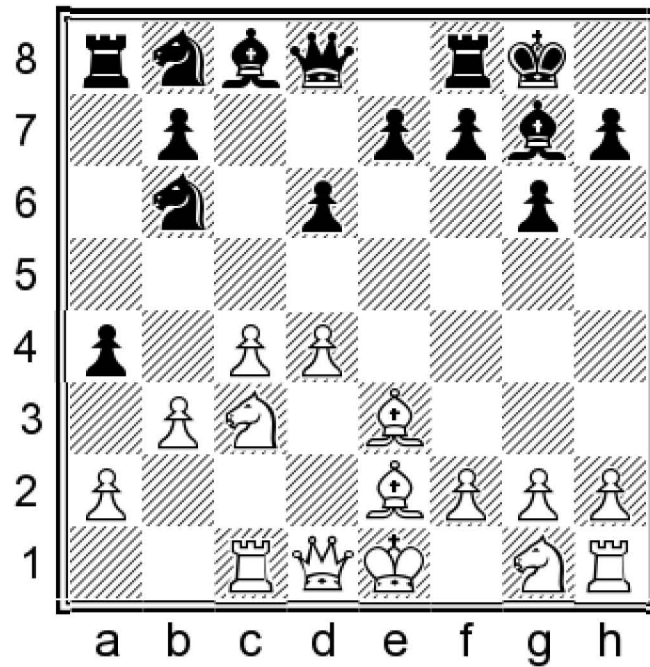
B) 9...e6 This introduces a dubious idea. 10.Nf3 Bd7 11.Be2 Bc6 12.0-0 Bxf3 Black has played three consecutive moves with his bishop just to trade it, which may appear peculiar. In our main line, 9...Bf5, he does however almost the same thing, and the real strategic defect of this conception lies somewhere else. 13.Bxf3 d5



Position after: 13...d5

14.cxd5! [White of course opens up the position in order to activate his bishops, rather than pleasing the enemy knights with 14.c5? Nc8∞.] Now 14...exd5 was Kazakov, M – Sergeev, V Ordzhonikidze 2001, at which point White could have questioned the black concept with 15.Na4! as pointed out by Chetverik and Kalinichenko, intending to follow 15...Nxa4 16.bxa4 with Rc5/Qb3 and White exerts heavy pressure.

C) With about three percent of the games following this course, 9...a5!? is a rare bird with interesting surprise value. 10.Be2 [10.a4?! obviously concedes a nice outpost at b4. 10...Nc6=] 10...a4! [10...Na6?! Black adopts an excessively passive setup. 11.Nf3 Bd7 12.0-0 White was comfortably better in Leko, P (2749) – Ivanchuk, V (2750) Odessa (rapid) 2007.]

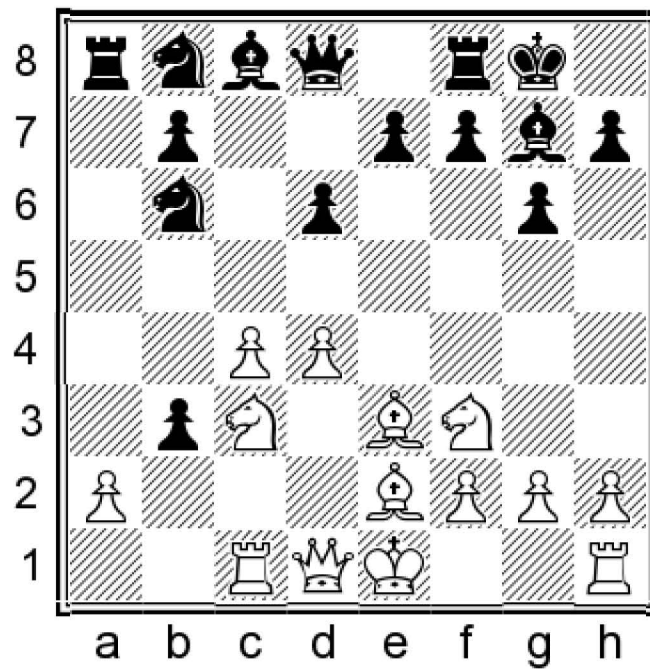


Position after: 10...a4!

C1) If Black is denied ...Bc8-g4 he will certainly find other ways to orientate his play. For instance, 11.h3 axb3 12.axb3 and now ...f5, ...Bf5 or 12...Nc6, hoping for 13.d5?! Nb4³, all deserve further analysis.

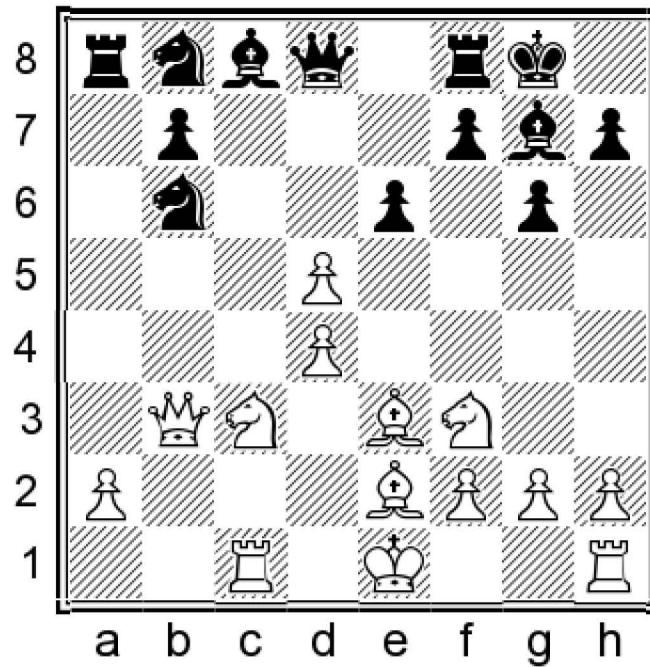
C2) C&K advocate the inferior 11.b4?! Nc6 12.a3, stopping here with the statement that the a4-pawn may become weak. They clearly underestimated Black's dynamism, since all the following lines lead to adequate counterplay: 12...d5 13.c5 Nc4 or 13...e5, or else 12...e5 13.Nf3 Bg4,, followed by 14...Bxf3.

C3) 11.Nf3! axb3



Position after: 11...axb3

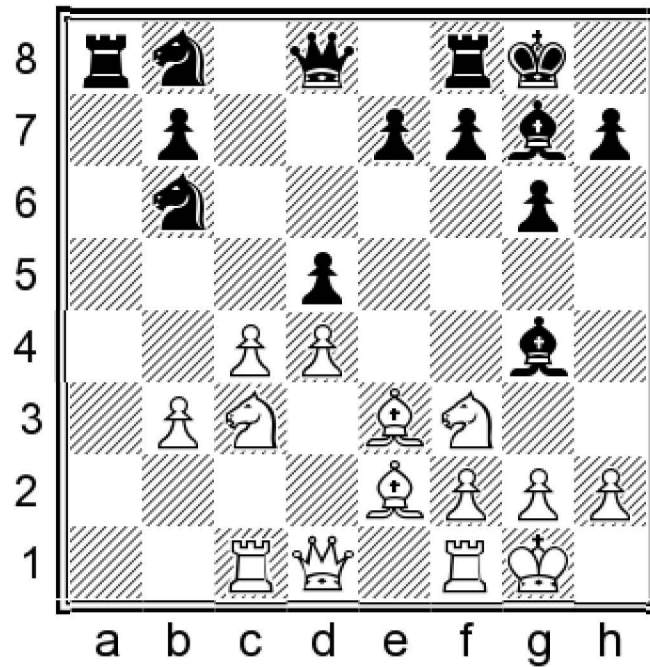
C3.1) 12.Qxb3!? This way White compromises his pawn structure but he underlines a drawback of his opponent's action: the unstable knight on b6. 12...d5!? [12...N6d7 13.0-0 Qa5 Is perhaps better objectively and quite acceptable for Black] 13.cxd5 [Black wanted to meet 13.c5?! with 13...Nc4 14.Bxc4 dxc4 15.Qxc4 Bg4© when he has easy play] 13...e6



Position after: 13...e6

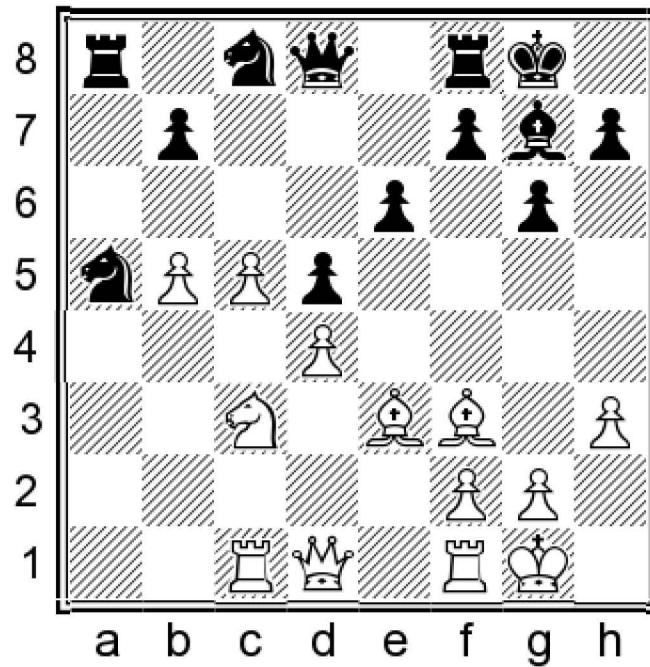
14.0-0 We are following Carbonnel, P (2175) – Rozentalis, E (2547) Budva 2019, which continued 14...Nxd5 15.Nxd5 exd5 16.Ne5². The machine suggests that 14.Bg5! was more testing, intending 14...Qd6 15.Nb5 Qxd5 and now the rather difficult-to-find 16.Qb1!. A more human continuation is 16.Nc7, but then 16...Qxb3 17.axb3 Ra2 18.Be7 Nc6 19.Bxf8 Bxf8 provides Black with adequate compensation for the exchange.

C3.2) 12.axb3 Bg4 13.0-0 [instead, I prefer 13.h3, e.g. 13...Bxf3 14.Bxf3 Nc6 15.0-0² Naumann, A – Vaganian, R Germany 2003] 13...d5



Position after: 13...d5

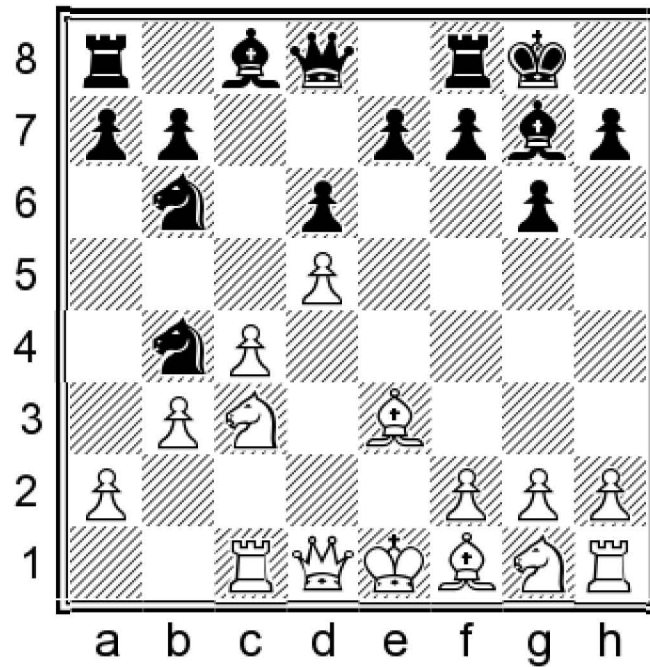
14.c5 [14.h3!? is possible as well but may lead to mass simplifications and a likely draw: 14...Bxf3 15.Bxf3 dxc4 (on 15...e6?! White would take 16.cxd5! as in the 9...e6 variation) 16.Bxb7 Ra3.] 14...Nc8 15.h3 Bxf3 16.Bxf3 e6 17.b4 Nc6 18.b5 Na5 ∞



Position after: 18...Na5

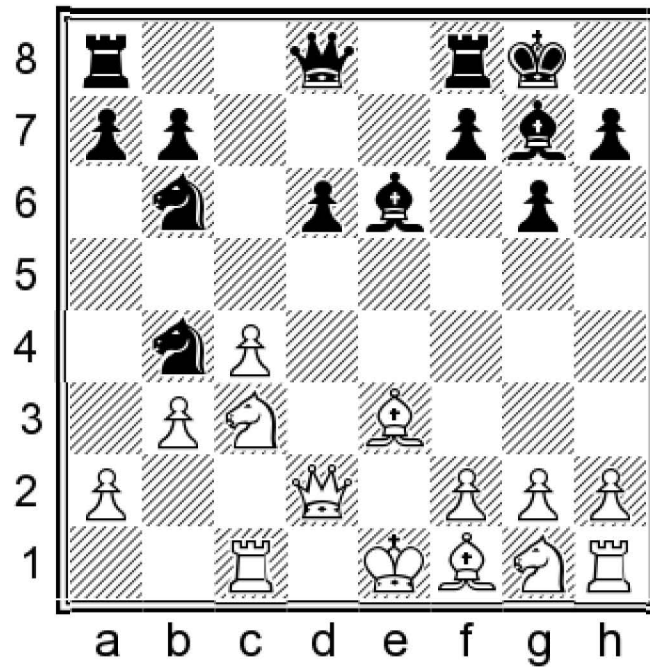
Zawadzka, J (2423) – Paehtz, E (2487) Wroclaw (rapid) 2018. This position is similar to the ones Black reaches in our main line, see 9...Bf5.

D) 9...Nc6 10.d5 Nb4 [10...Ne5 11.Be2 – see 8...Nc6]



Position after: 10...Nb4

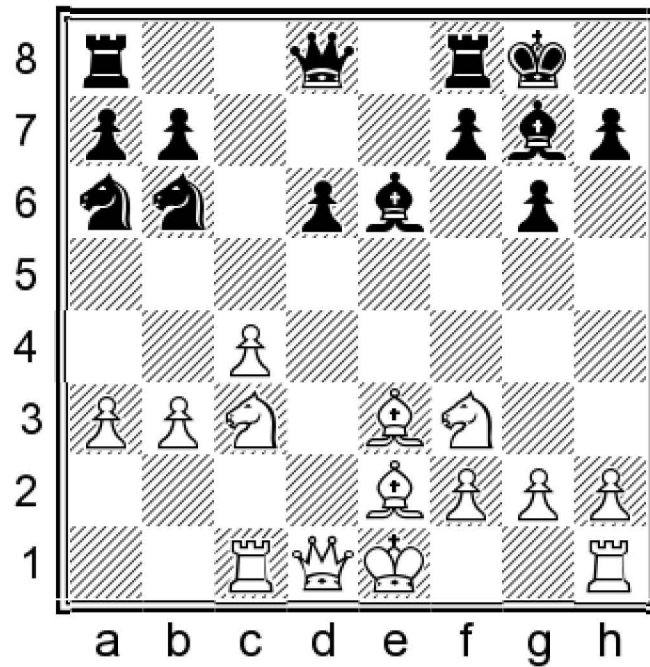
D1) 11.Qd2?! is inaccurate. 11...e6 [11...e5 should come to the same thing because leaving the duo e5 and f5 would be dangerous for White]
 12.dxe6 [after 12.Nb5!? the machine's main line is the witty 12...a6
 13.Na7 a5∞] 12...Bxe6



Position after: 12...Bxe6

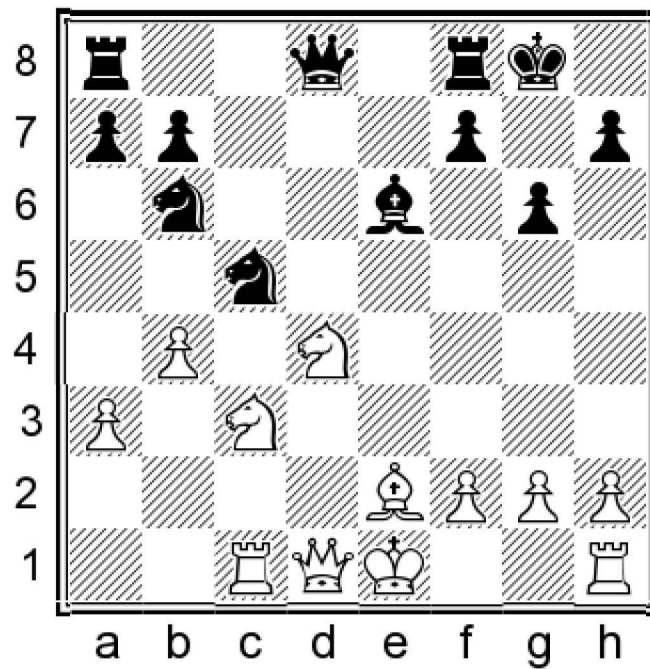
So far behind in development as he is, White can't hinder the freeing ...d6-d5. 13.Nf3 Nc6 14.Be2 d5 15.Nxd5 Nxd5 16.cxd5 Qxd5 17.Qxd5 Bxd5 Black had a marginally better position in Reymann, C (2195) – Gozzoli, Y (2419) France 2003.

D2) 11.a3! Pushing the rival knight back to the edge before it can return to c6 (after the sequence ...e6 dxe6 ...Bxe6) makes sense. 11...Na6 12.Be2 [12.Nf3 will transpose.] 12...e6 13.dxe6 Bxe6 14.Nf3²



Position after: 14.Nf3²

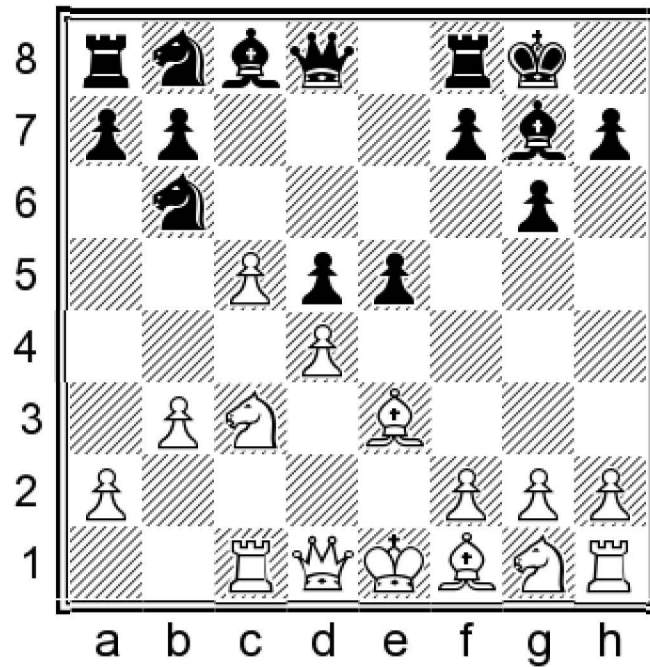
White will castle next, and possibly continue Nf3-d4. Black still has some issues to solve with his isolated d-pawn, since the attempt to get rid of it at once fails: 14...d5 15.c5 d4 16.Bxd4! [the inferior 16.Nxd4?! promptly petered out into a draw in the following game: 16...Nxc5 17.Ncb5 Bxb3 18.Nxb3 Qxd1+ 19.Rxd1 Nxb3= ½-½ Barbeau, S (2397) – Nogueiras Santiago, J (2546) Montreal 2002] 16...Bxd4 17.Nxd4 Nxc5 18.b4



Position after: 18.b4

Now White gets a marked edge after either 18...Ncd7 19.Nxe6 fxe6 or 18...Bb3!? 19.Nxb3 Qxd1+ 20.Bxd1 Nd3+ 21.Kd2 Nxc1 22.Kxc1 and on either 22...Rac8 or 22...Rfc8 there would follow 23.Nc5±.

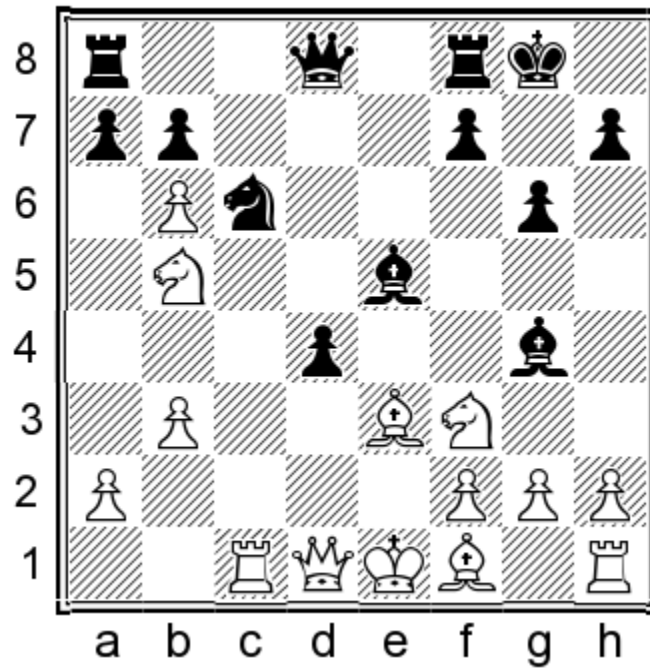
E) 9...d5!? A very fresh idea, trying to profit from the white king's position, still stuck in the center. 10.c5 e5



Position after: 10...e5

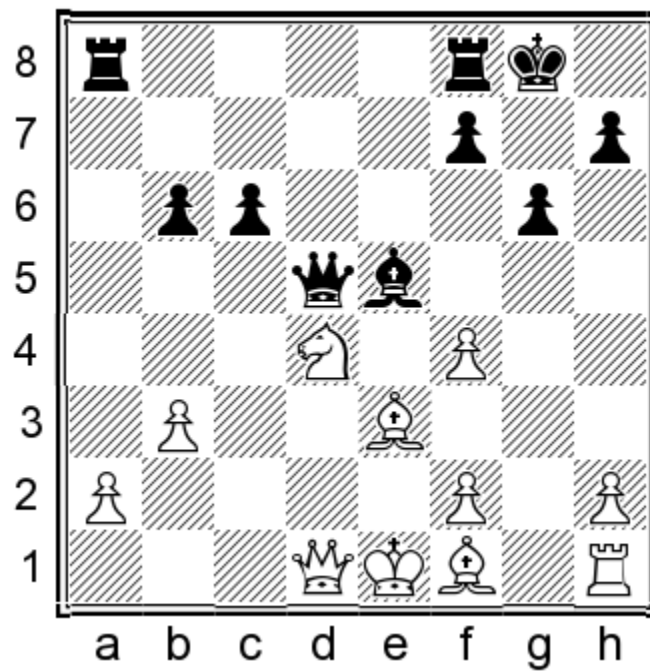
E1) 11.cxb6 Nc6 12.Nge2 exd4 13.Nxd4 Bxd4 14.Bxd4 Qh4 15.Ne2 axb6© Black intends a mix of ...Re8, ...Rxa2 and ...Bg4. [15...Re8?! 16.Rxc6 bxc6 17.bxa7 is better for White according to the machine.]

E2) 11.dxe5 Nc6 12.cxb6 d4 13.Nb5 Bxe5 14.Nf3 Bg4



Position after: 14...Bg4

15.Rxc6 [15.Bg5 could be better.] 15...Bxf3 16.gxf3 bxc6 17.Nxd4 axb6 18.f4 Qd5∞



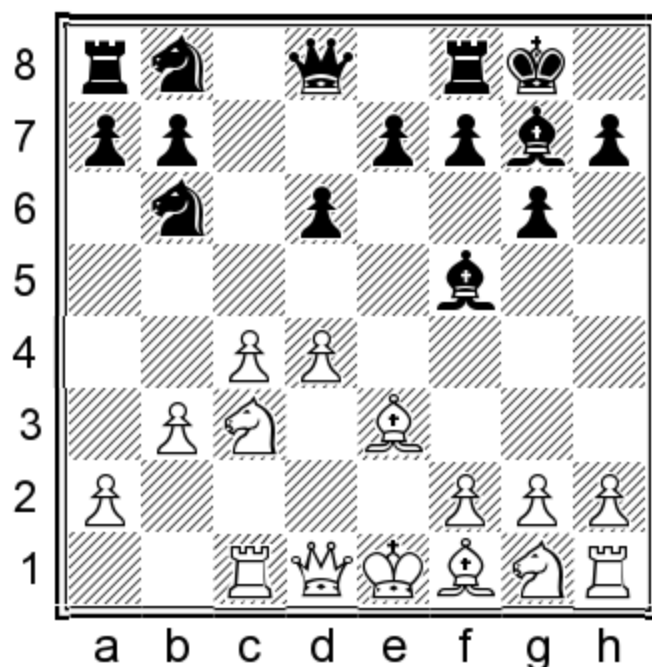
Position after: 18...Qd5

0-1 (43) Loiseau, Q (2459) – Eugene, F (2343) French league 2021.

Conclusion: Although Black may reach complicated middlegame positions if he deviates from 9...e5 or 9...Bf5, I am skeptical about his chances of equalizing if his opponent is relatively well prepared.

i) 6.Nc3 g6 7.Be3 Bg7 8.Rc1 0-0 9.b3 Bf5 10.--

1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.c4 Nb6 5.exd6 cxd6 6.Nc3 g6 7.Be3 Bg7 8.Rc1 0-0 9.b3 Bf5



Position after: 9...Bf5

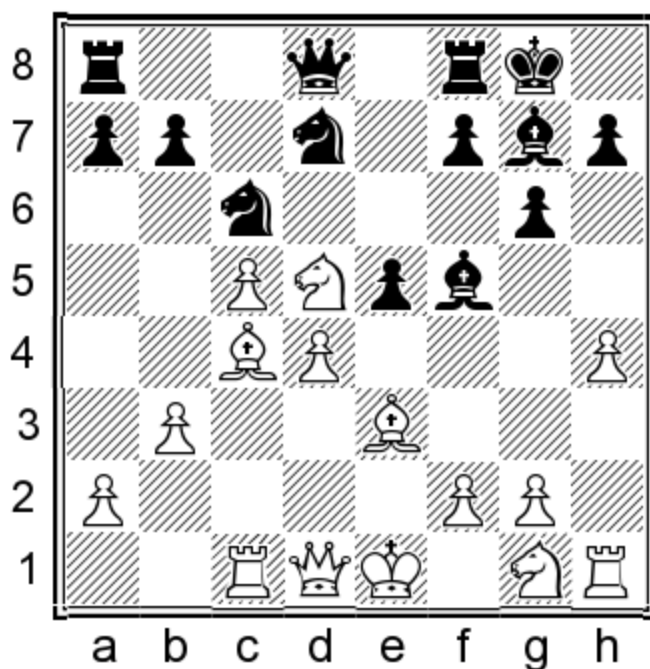
The bishop move, more entertaining than 9...e5, is my preference here. It provides Black with more winning chances, and since its branches are more numerous, there is much more scope for interesting developments than in the Voronezh endgame.

We will have a look at no fewer than six white options here, bearing in mind that 10.Nf3 and 10.Be2 together represent about 75 percent of all the games deriving from this position.

10.g4?!

This push can be advised if White wants some “excitement”, but pushing the g-pawn is quite compromising to say the least.

A) White runs a slight risk of being overwhelmed in the centre if he opts for the primitive 10.h4, but I was nevertheless amazed to find only one game out of more than 400 with it. Now 10...Nc6, intending ...e7-e5, was worth considering, whereas 10...d5 11.c5 N6d7 12.Nxd5 Nc6 13.Bc4 e5©



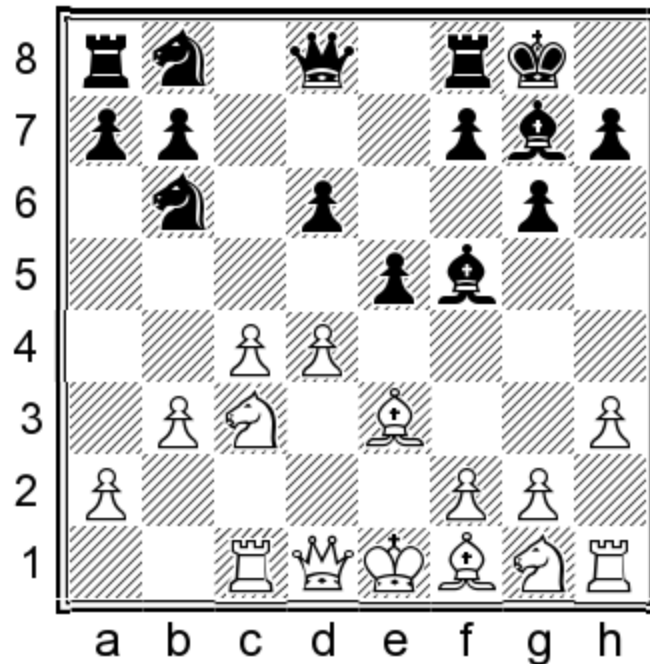
Position after: 13...e5©

visibly brought Black adequate compensation in Perez Ponsa, F (2577) – Llanos, G (2298) Neuquen 2017.

B) With 10.h3 White rules out the possibility of ...Bg4xf3. He also intends to show that Black’s light-squared bishop is still a concern and that some

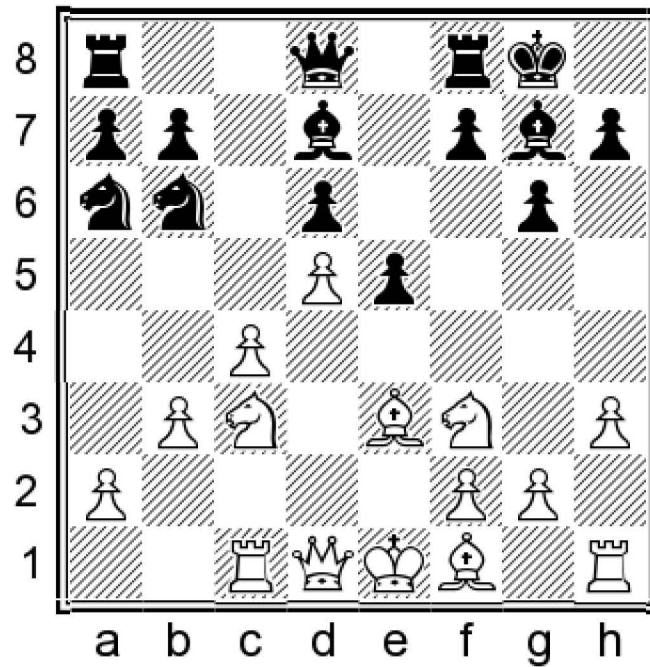
opening problems remain to be solved.

B1) 10...e5!? Has been tried only once and the outcome of the opening was a success for Black.



Position after: 10...e5!?

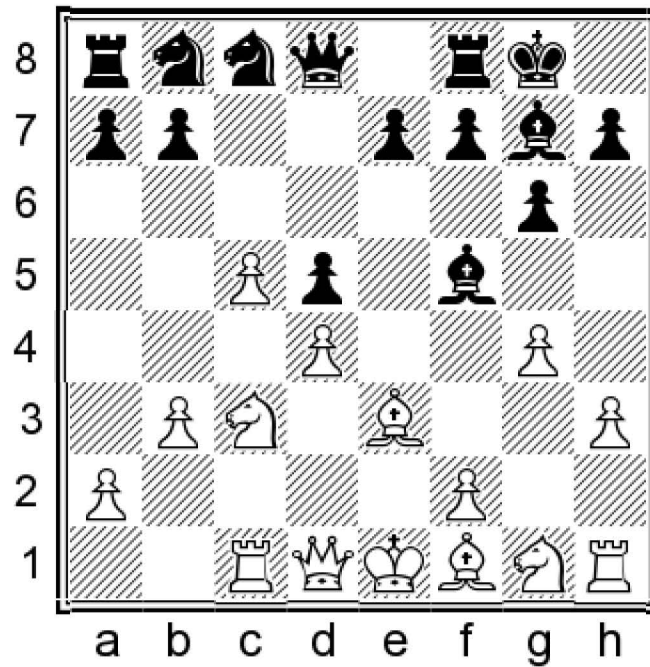
If White opts for 11.dxe5 dxe5, there are quite a few nuances compared to the same position without h3 and ...Bf5. True, he could try to profit from the bishop's position by means of 12.g4 followed by 13.Bg2, but this is hardly frightening. Being able to retreat the knight to c8 after a subsequent c4-c5 and generally having his bishop at f5 rather than c8, if Black instead withdraws ...N6d7, are more important factors in my opinion. 11.d5 [maybe 11.Nf3 Nc6 12.d5 is more challenging, but I like Black's chances anyway] 11...Na6 12.Nf3 Bd7



Position after: 12...Bd7

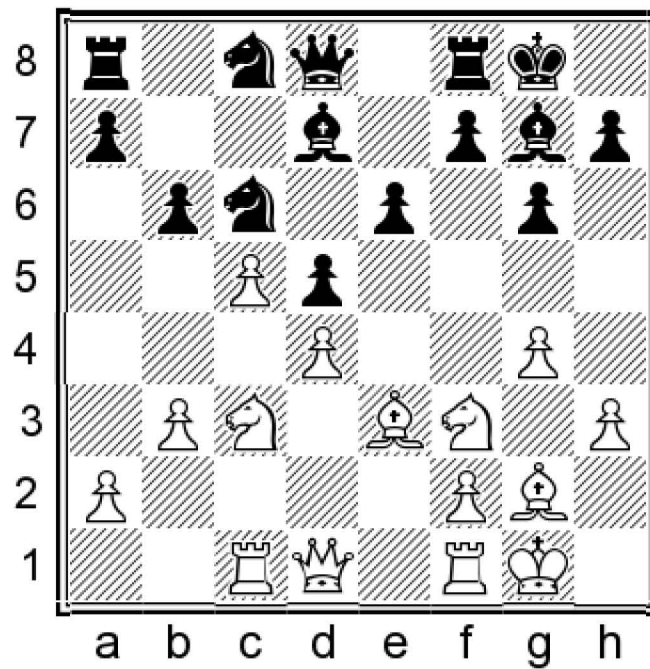
13.Ne4?! This was White's choice in Haussernot, C (2006) – Nicoara, M (2108) Saint-Quentin 2014, but following 13...Nc8 14.c5 Nxc5 15.Nxc5 dxc5 16.Bxc5 Re8 Black stood a bit better. 13.h4 and 13.Ng5 are likely better.

B2) 10...d5 11.c5 Nc8 12.g4



Position after: 12.g4

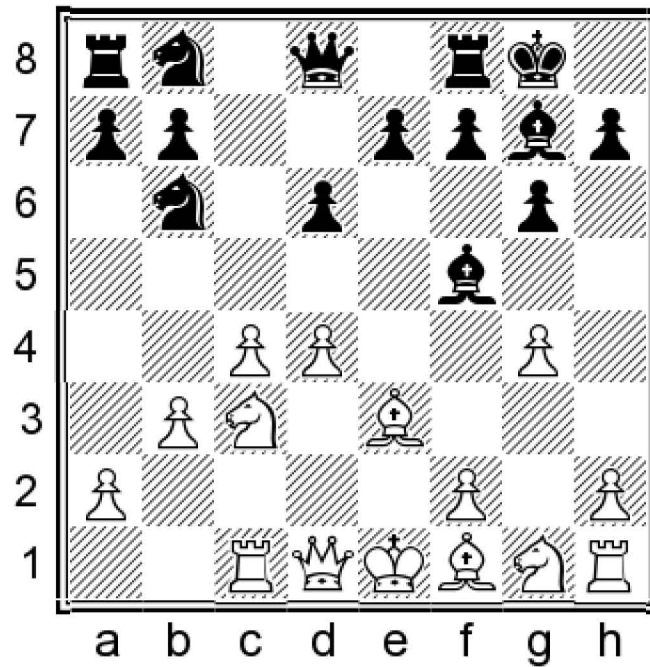
This double-edged move has the merit of stopping ...Nc6 followed by either ...e7-e5 or ...e7-e6 and ...Bf5-e4, which could happen if instead White develops “normally” with Nf3. 12...Bd7 13.Bg2 e6 14.Nf3 Nc6 15.0-0 b6 [15...f5 looks premature due to 16.Qd2.]



Position after: 15...b6

16.Qd2 [White could have considered 16.cxb6 and 16.a3 as well.] Now
 16...bxc5 17.dxc5 was difficult to assess, Neiksans, A (2620) –
 Chetverik, M (2241) Riga 2016.

Back to 10.g4?!.



Position after: 10.g4?!

10...Bd7

A) 10...Bc8 was employed in the recent encounter Sliwicka, A (2317) – Bulmaga, I (2440) chess.com 2020, with similar consequences. Where the bishop stands better is questionable, but one thing is for sure: Black will have his share of play.

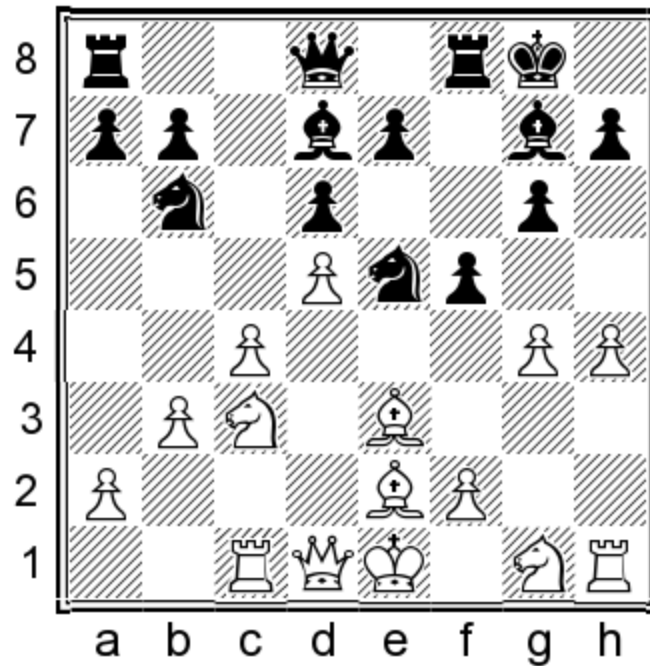
B) 10...Be6?! proved suspicious in Dauletova, G (2319) – Bulmaga, I (2440) chess.com 2020, which continued 11.Bg2 d5 and now 12.c5 gave White a pleasant plus. Instead 11...Qc8 12.h3 f5 13.Qd2 would also have been promising for the first player.

11.Bg2

Now 11.h3 f5 provides Black with dynamic counterplay, which he also gets after the more aggressive 11.h4?! Nc6.

A) 12.h5 d5 [12...e5 13.d5 Nd4[∞] is not quite as strong], intending 13.c5 e5! 14.dxe5 d4³.

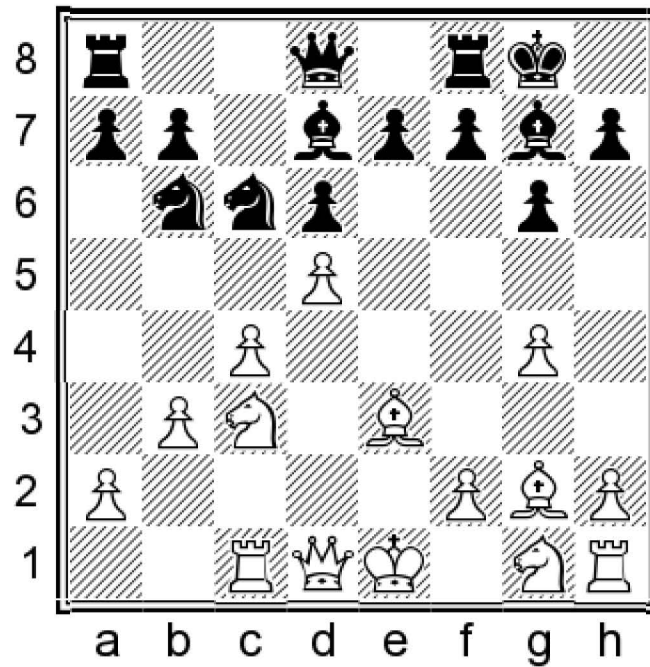
B) 12.d5 Ne5 13.Be2 f5³



Position after: 13...f5³

Can, I (2380) – Babazada, K (2409) lichess.org 2020. In this complicated middlegame the white king will be the more vulnerable in my opinion.

11...Nc6 12.d5



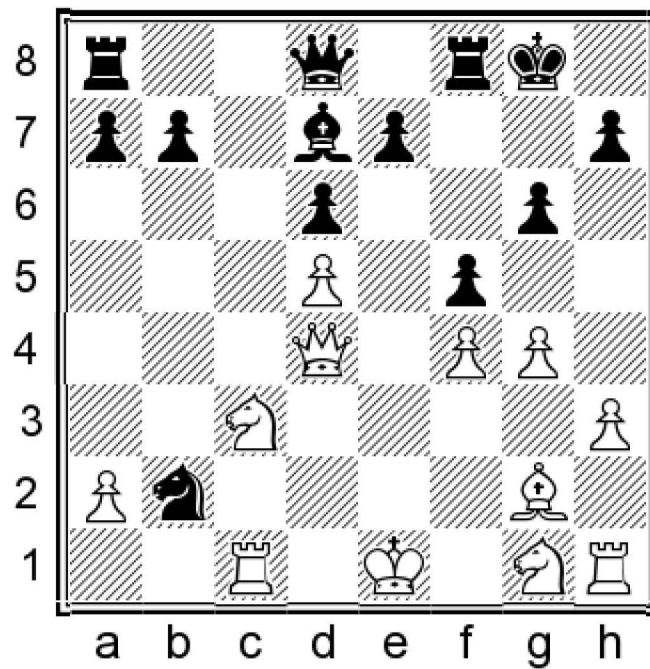
Position after: 12.d5

Black now has to decide between 12...Nb4 13.a3 Na6, Zawadzka, J (2423) – Paehtz, E (2487) Wroclaw (rapid) 2018, and our main line.

12...Ne5 13.h3 f5 14.f4 Nexc4!

14...Nf7? 15.g5 Jakubowski, K (2510) – Movsziszian, K (2486) Porto Mannu 2019 was clearly worse for Black. He will indeed have to push his e-pawn in order to avoid suffocation, but after dxe6 White could quickly consolidate his advantage.

15.bxc4 Nxc4 16.Bd4 Nb2 17.Qd2 Bxd4 18.Qxd4



Position after: 18.Qxd4

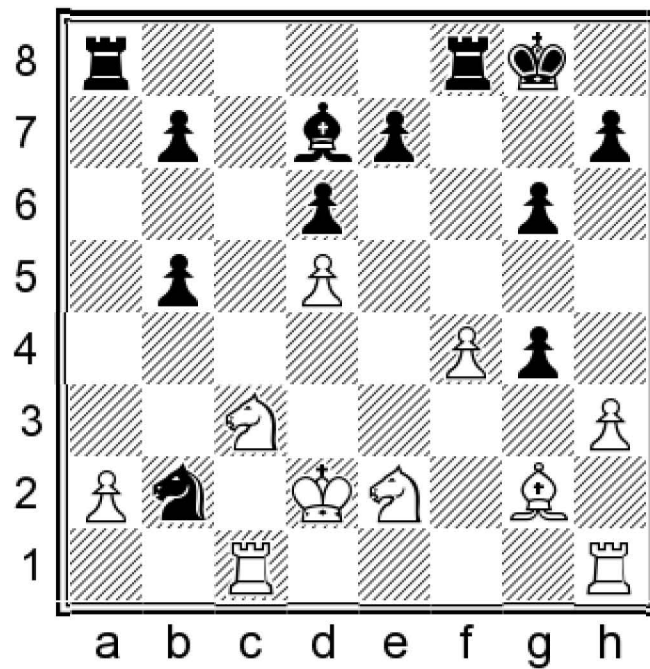
18...Qb6

18...fxg4!? would have kept a lively middlegame with mutual chances, where 19.Nge2 is White's safest. Here you have a sample (unforced) line illustrating how things can go wrong for him: 19.Rb1 Rxf4 20.Be4 Na4 21.Nxa4?? e5! 22.dxe6 Qa5+ 23.Nc3 Rxe4+ 24.Qxe4 Qxc3+ followed by 25...Bc6–+.

19.Qxb6 axb6 20.Kd2

20.Bf1!²

20...fxg4 21.Nge2 b5=



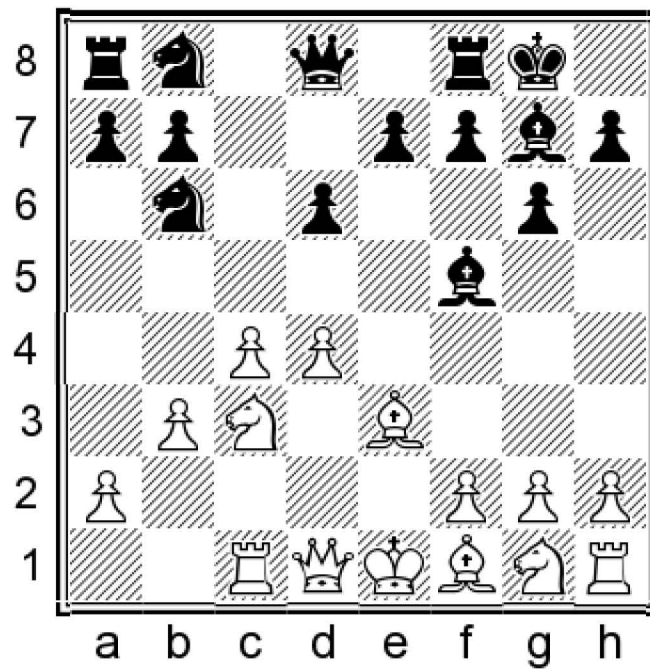
Position after: 21...b5=

This occurred in Zelbel, P (2439) – Bezemer, A (2243) Belgium 2020, which ended in a draw after eight more moves.

Black has three pawns for the piece and a logical scenario is that he will manage to trade a few more pawns in the near future.

j) 6.Nc3 g6 7.Be3 Bg7 8.Rc1 0-0 9.b3 Bf5 10.d5

1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.c4 Nb6 5.exd6 cxd6 6.Nc3 g6 7.Be3 Bg7 8.Rc1 0-0 9.b3 Bf5



Position after: 9...Bf5

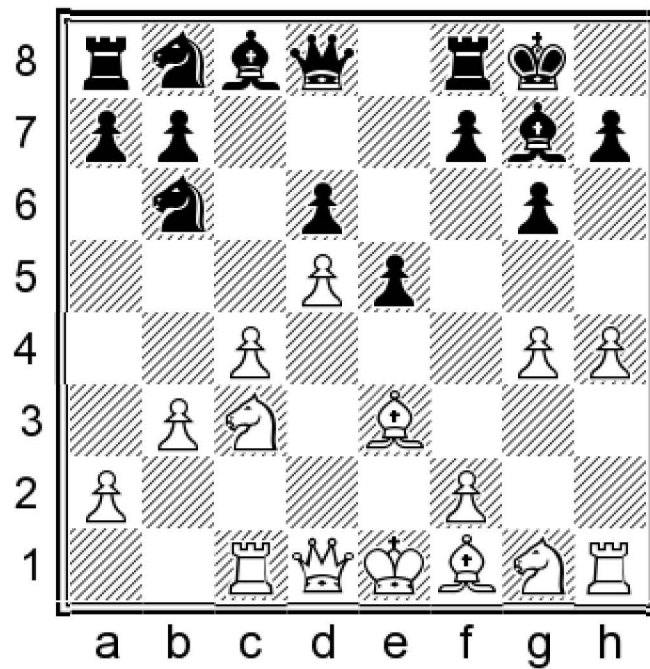
10.d5

This is C&K's main line but they don't take into account the possibility of...

10...e6!

10...e5

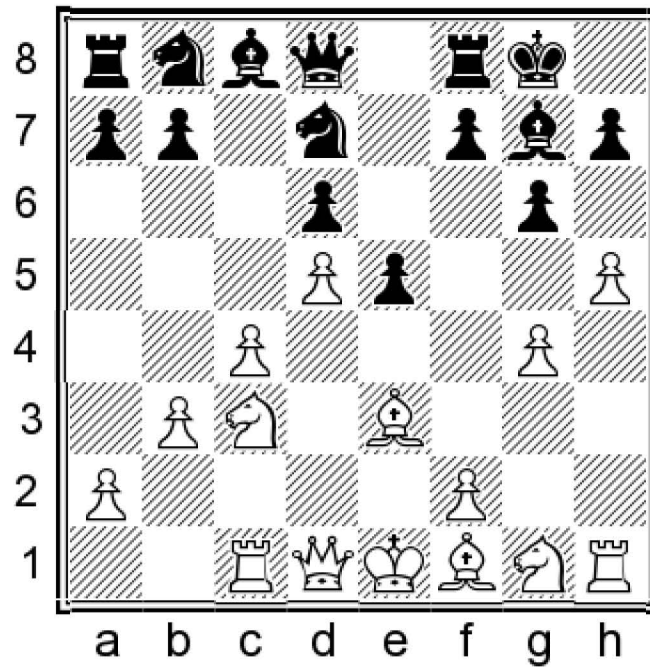
A) 11.g4 is more enterprising and sharper but also irrelevant to us because we want to play 10...e6!. 11...Bc8 12.h4



Position after: 12.h4

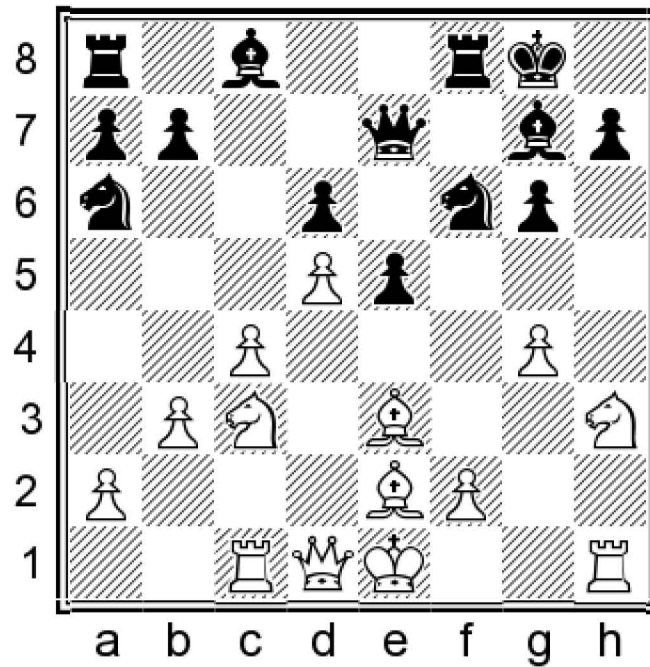
A1) 12...f5 13.h5 ∞ occurred in Dvoirys, S (2612) – Steffens, O (2244) Oberwart 2004, and the alternative 13.gxf5!? Bxf5 14.h5 suggested by C&K also makes sense. Intuitively I feel that pushing his f-pawn will weaken the black king more than it will bring the second player any concrete counterplay.

A2) 12...N6d7 13.h5



Position after: 13.h5

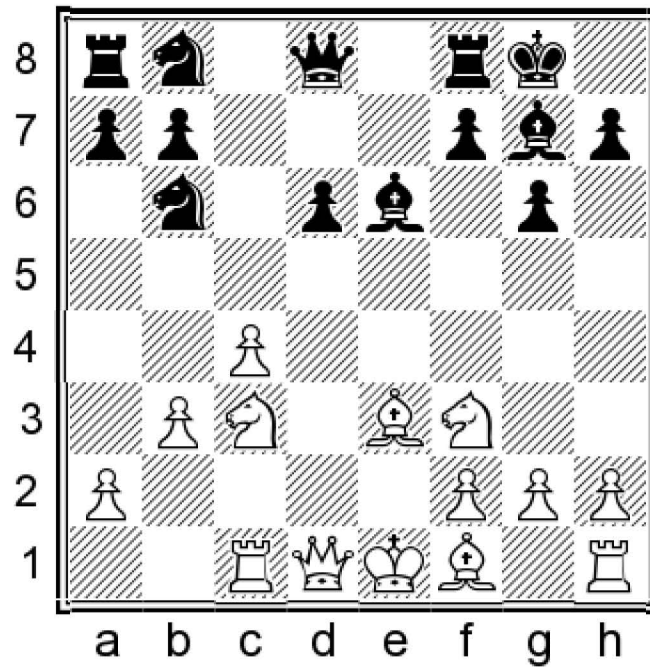
13...Qe7 This move was employed recently, but analysis shows that the white kingside assault has to be taken seriously. Therefore 13...Na6 or the pawn sacrifice 13...e4 14.Nxe4 Qe7 may be safer options. Black's compensation might not be fully sufficient in the second case, but he will certainly generate some dynamism. [13...f5?! proved quite dangerous for Black in the game Can, I (2380) – Manafov, V (2236) lichess.org 2020, which continued 14.hxg6 hxg6 15.gxf5 gxf5 16.Bh6,.] 14.hxg6 fxg6 [On 14...hxg6 15.c5! seems strong 15...Nxc5 and now that the black knight has been lured in another direction there follows the unexpected 16.Qf3! f.] 15.Nh3 Nf6 16.Be2 Na6



Position after: 16...Na6

We are following Sosa, T (2508) – Ayats Llobera, G (2377) Barcelona 2019. At this point White missed the powerful pawn sacrifice 17.c5! Nxc5 18.Bxc5 dxc5 19.d6 Qd8 20.Ng5 when the engine credits White with a sizeable edge.

B) 11.dxe6 Bxe6 12.Nf3

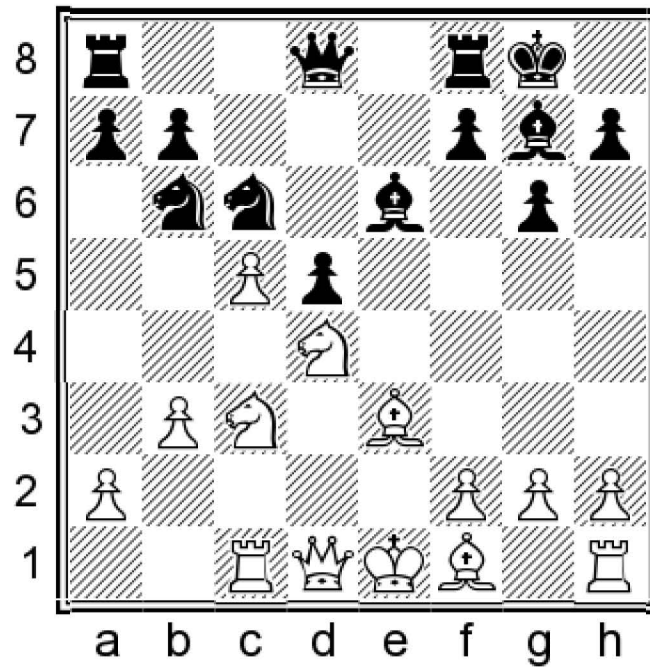


Position after: 12.Nf3

Basically Black is doing fine here; he will get rid of his backward d-pawn while in the meantime his opponent will move his king into safety.

12...Nc6 [The straightforward 12...d5 is equally alright since White can't conveniently grab a pawn with 13.Bxb6 next 14.cxd5, while after 13.c5 Nc8 (Black is planning ...Nc6 and ...Qa5) 14.Be2 Nc6 15.Nb5 N8e7 16.0-0 Nf5,, White won't find it easy to set up a blockade on d4.]

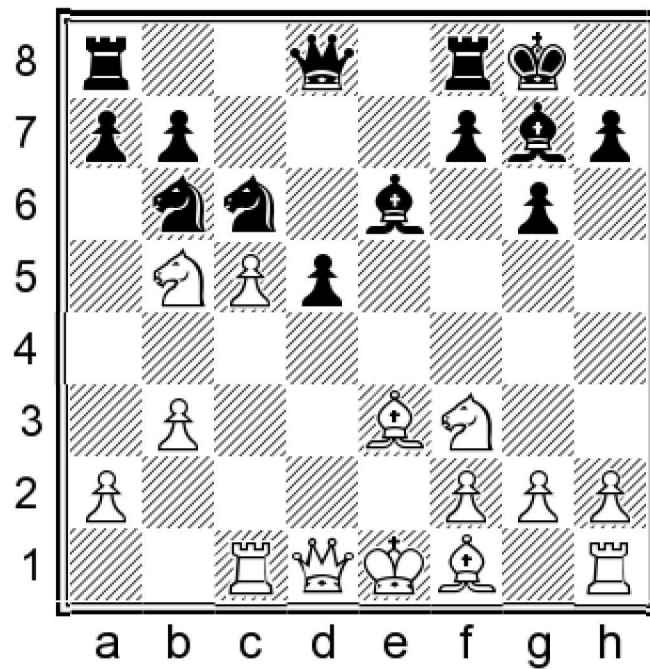
B1) 13.Nd4?! already gives Black the upper hand. 13...d5! 14.c5



Position after: 14.c5

14...Bxd4! [14...Nd7?!, with 15...Rc8 coming next, was only about equal in Landa, K (2610) – Souleidis, G (2419) Porto Mannu 2016.] 15.Bxd4 This happened in Xiong, J (2618) – Kamsky, G (2678) Saint Louis 2016, where instead of the game continuation, 15...Re8, 15...Qh4 would have given Black a marked advantage.

B2) 13.Nb5 This limits the damage. 13...d5 14.c5

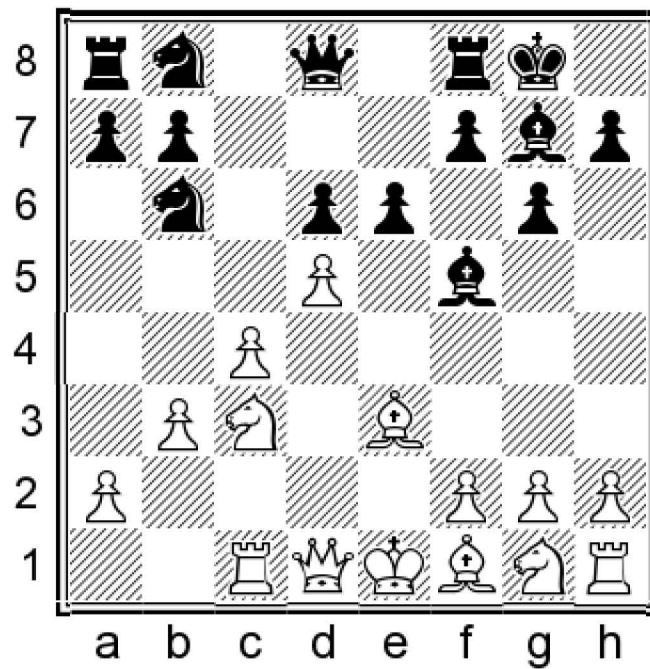


Position after: 14.c5

Now 14...d4 15.Nbxd4 Nxd4 16.Bxd4 Nd5 gave Black enough compensation for the pawn in Dai, C (2464) – Zhao Jun (2607) Tianjin 2018, but 14...Nc8 and 14...Nd7, as in Perelshtein, E – Mulyar, M New York 1998, are valid too.

C) In the event of 11.Nf3!? Black would have achieved a favorable pawn structure without being bothered by a direct white attack on the kingside. The situation remains messy though, the break c4-c5 being a notable item on White's agenda.

Let's focus on 10...e6 now.

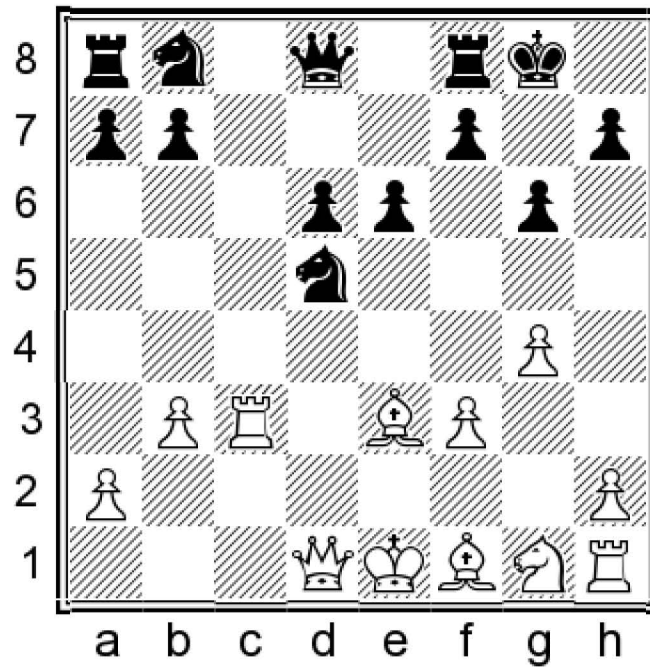


Position after: 10...e6!

11.Bd3

A) 11.dxe6 – see 10...e5 11.dxe6.

B) If White naively thinks he'll win a piece with 11.g4, a cold shower awaits him. 11...Bxc3+ 12.Rxc3 Be4 13.f3 Bxd5! 14.cxd5 [14.Bxb6? grabs a piece but at the cost of leaving the white king fatally exposed: 14...axb6 15.cxd5 Qh4+ followed by 16...Rxa2+ or possibly 16...Re8, with a tremendous black initiative.] 14...Nxd5



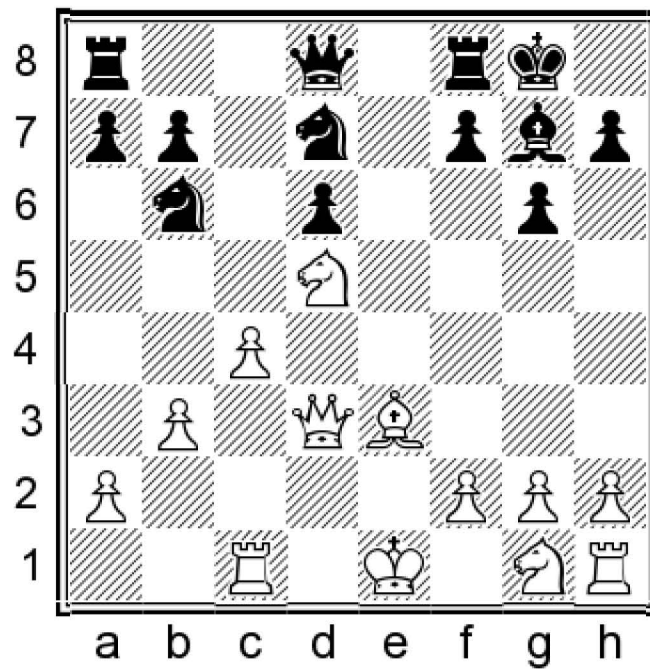
Position after: 14...Nxd5

B1) 15.Rd3 Nxe3 16.Rxe3 Qh4+ 17.Ke2 Nc6 is not unplayable for White, but he will need time to regroup harmoniously while being only marginally ahead in material. I'd definitely take Black here!

B2) Or 15.Ne2 Nc6 16.Bg2 and now 16...f5 is not so easy to handle for either side, but at least OK for Black [the same applies to 16...Nxc3 17.Nxc3 d5].

11...Bxd3 12.Qxd3 exd5 13.Nxd5 N8d7=

The position is around equal.

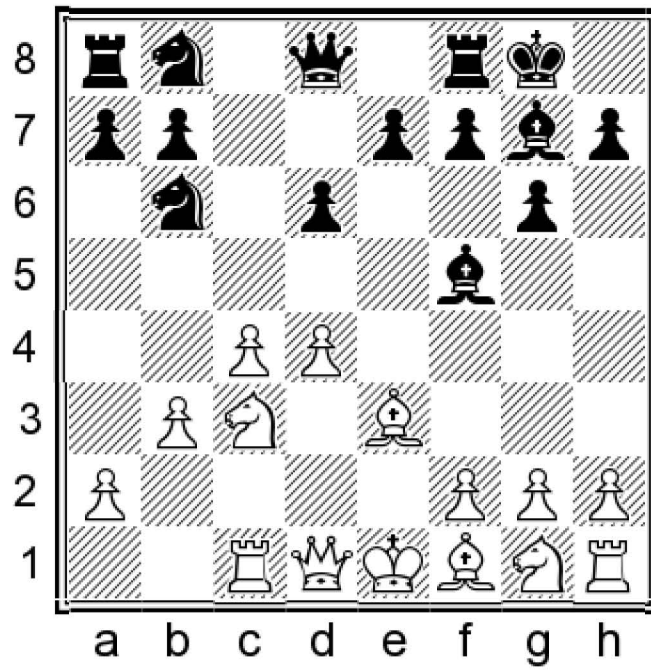


Position after: 13...N8d7=

Zhao, J (2634) – Zhou, J (2612) China 2016.

k) 6.Nc3 g6 7.Be3 Bg7 8.Rc1 0-0 9.b3 Bf5 10.Be2

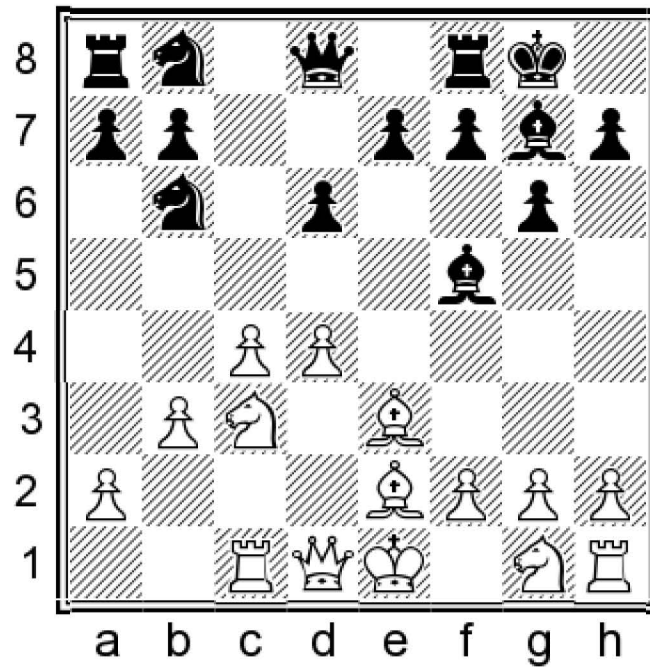
**1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.c4 Nb6 5.exd6 cxd6 6.Nc3 g6 7.Be3 Bg7
8.Rc1 0-0 9.b3 Bf5**



Position after: 9...Bf5

10.Be2

After 10.Be2 Black has two options. Let's take a look at both of them.

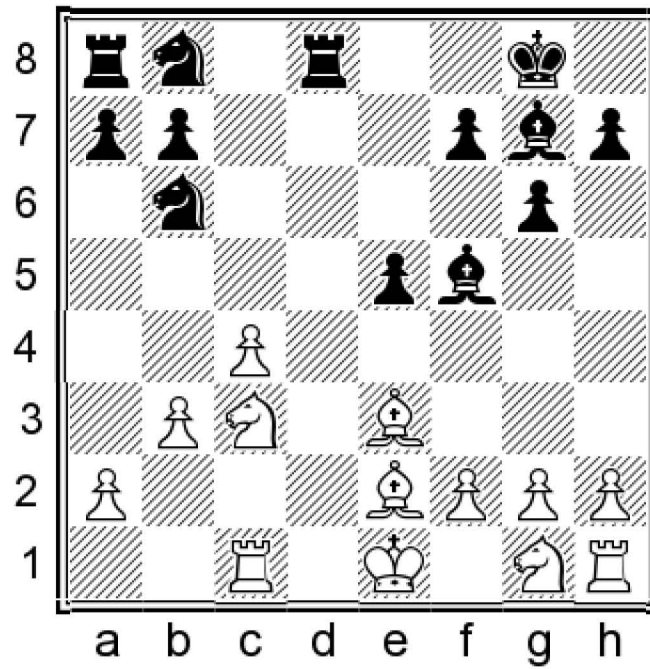


Position after: 10.Be2

10...d5

10...e5 (C&K) is also valid, and indeed Chetverik has tested the black side with success. While 10.Be2 is more useful than 10.h3, Black should again be favored by the insertion of Be2/...Bf5 in comparison with 9...e5.

A) The ending deriving from 11.dxe5 dxe5 12.Qxd8 [or 12.Nb5 Nc6= Delchev, A (2556) – Dimitrov, R (2535) Kozloduy 2019] 12...Rxd8 doesn't promise White any advantage.

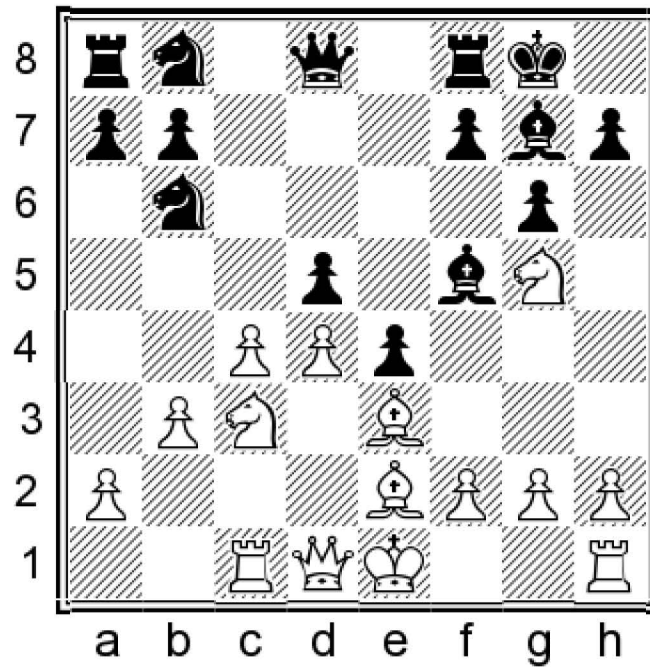


Position after: 12...Rxd8

For instance, 13.c5 Nc8 14.Nf3 [14.Bf3 Nc6³ Krzyzanowski, M (2477) – Wang, C (2470) Aracaju 2018] 14...Nc6 15.0-0 N8e7=.

B) 11.Nf3!

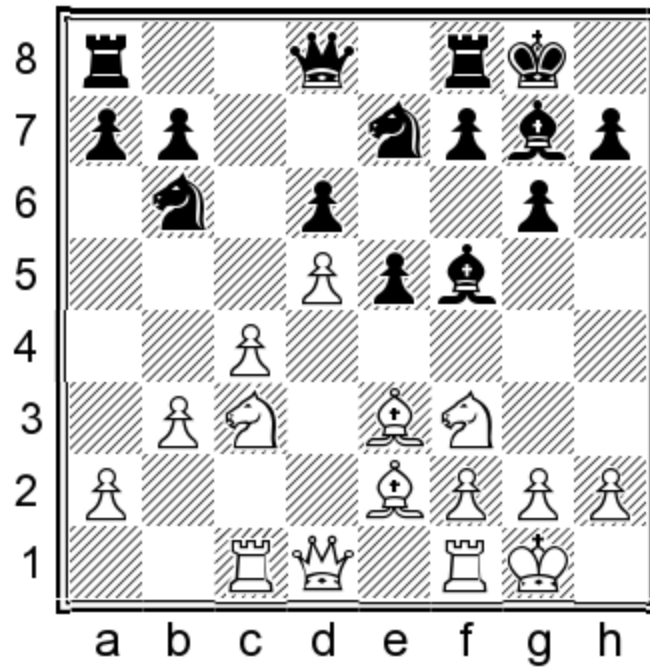
B1) 11...e4?! 12.Ng5 d5



Position after: 12...d5

Here 13.c5 Nc8 was unclear in Bernadskiy, V (2581) – Plischki, S (2397) Prague 2019 [but White could have secured a distinct edge with 13.cxd5! Nxd5 14.Nxd5 Qxd5 15.g4! and the e4-pawn is doomed to fall after an imminent Rc5 or Bc4].

B2) 11...Nc6 12.d5 [12.0-0!?] 12...Ne7 13.0-0



Position after: 13.0-0

At this point it seems logical to vacate the f5-square, for either the knight or the f-pawn, so the moves 13...Bg4 and 13...Bd7 suggest themselves. White may objectively be slightly for choice, though.

11.c5

11.Bf3? Nc6³ intending to blow apart the centre after 12.c5 e5!!.



Position after: 12...e5!!

After the capture on d5 Black would recover his investment thanks to ...Nb4.

11...Nc8

In the event of 11...N6d7?! 12.Nxd5 e5 Black obviously gets some activity for the pawn but objectively it isn't sufficient. 13.Nf3 Be4 [on 13...Nc6 simply 14.0-0±] Now both 14.Nc3 and 14.Bg5 f6 15.Bc4 turn slightly in White's favor.



Position after: 11...Nc8

12.g4

It isn't easy for White to do without this weakening move if he wants to fight for an opening edge, but obviously it isn't to everyone's taste to worry about his king for the remainder of the game.

A) 12.Bf3

A1) 12...e5! 13.Bxd5 [Not 13.dxe5? Nc6³ Ovod, E (2347) – Cornette, D (2405) Monaco (rapid) 2019.] 13...exd4! [13...Nc6 14.Bxc6 bxc6 15.Nge2 transposes into 12...Nc6.] 14.Bxd4 Bxd4 15.Qxd4 Nc6!©



Position after: 15...Nc6!©

and Black had adequate play in the rapid game Bijaoui, M – Cornette, D Europe-Echecs 2020.

A2) 12...e6?! is less to the point than pushing the e-pawn two squares.



Position after: 12...e6?!

13.g4 [13.Nge2 also proved better for White in Pucher, S (2294) – Barthel, A (2186) Metz 2014, which continued 13...Nc6 14.0-0 g5 15.g4 Bg6 and now the most precise would have been 16.Qd2!².] 13...Be4 14.Nxe4 dxe4 15.Bxe4 Nc6 16.Ne2 N8e7 17.0-0² Black didn't have quite

enough for his pawn, Corrales Jimenez, F (2559) – Zhao Jun (2610) chess.com 2019.

A3) 12...Nc6 (C&K) 13.Bxd5 e5 14.Bxc6 bxc6 15.Nge2!?



Position after: 15.Nge2!?

Leriché, L (2129) – Philippe, C (2375) Montpellier 2015. Black certainly has some compensation but maybe not quite enough.

B) 12.b4 Nc6 13.b5 This allowed the simplification 13...Nxd4! 14.Bxd4 e5 15.Nf3 exd4 16.Nxd4 Ne7= Drygalov, A (2430) – Baburin, A (2463) Cheliabinsk 2017.

12...Bd7



Position after: 12...Bd7

13.h3

Definitely more cautious than pushing the h-pawn two squares forward, this move enables White to play Ng1-f3 soon.

13.h4 White plans h4-h5xg6 followed by Qd2 and Bh6, but Black is on time for a central break. Two approaches are now sensible: allowing the bind with f2-f4 or sacrificing one or two pawns before it comes. Some sample lines follow.

A) 13...e5!? 14.dxe5



Position after: 14.dxe5

A1) 14...d4 15.Bxd4 Nc6 was the continuation of Corrales Jimenez, F (2532) – Yuffa, D (2594) lichess.org 2020, where rather than 16.Be3 Nxe5 with about equal chances White could have gained an edge with 16.f4!.

A2) Or 14...Nc6 15.f4 N8e7 Further investigations are required to establish whether Black is objectively OK here, but his side is for sure easier to handle. Now 16.Nxd5 Be6 is roughly equal according to the engine despite White's two extra pawns, while after 16.h5 both 16...d4 and 16...g5!? need to be checked.

B) 13...Nc6 14.f4 b6



Position after: 14...b6

This position was reached in Baklan, V (2605) – Manea, A (2347) Sovata 2018, where White now erred with 15.cxb6?! axb6³. After the improvement 15.Na4 bxc5 16.Nxc5 Nd6,, Black would still have had nothing to complain about.

13...Nc6

13...e5?! looks too optimistic here compared to the same position with the white pawn on h4.

14.Nf3

14.f4 b6 15.Nf3 e6 Both sides have their chances.

14...e6[∞]



Position after: 14...e6[∞]

1) 6.Nc3 g6 7.Be3 Bg7 8.Rc1 0-0 9.b3 Bf5 10.Nf3

**1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.c4 Nb6 5.exd6 cxd6 6.Nc3 g6 7.Be3 Bg7
8.Rc1 0-0 9.b3 Bf5 10.Nf3**



Position after: 10.Nf3

Now 10...e5 is once more playable, and – quite surprisingly – very rare. The explanation is probably that Black is doing fine if he adopts a typical Alekhine setup, which he reaches by starting with either 10...d5 or 10...Bg4; there seems to be no relevant difference between those two moves.

10...Bg4

10...d5



Position after: 10...d5

A) 11.Be2 An invitation to play against hanging pawns, if Black now goes for 11...dxc4 12.bxc4 Nc6. This is conceivable from the black perspective, but most of the games will transpose into the customary sequence we will soon see. 11...Nc6 12.0-0 Bg4 13.c5 Nc8 14.b4 a6



Position after: 14...a6

Black has gained a better version of the main line 11.c5 Nc8 12.b4 because he has slowed down his opponent's natural queenside play. Now 15.a4? runs into 15...Nxb4 16.Rb1 a5, so that possible follow-ups are as follows.

A1) 15.Rb1 e6 16.a4 N8e7 17.b5 axb5 18.axb5 Na5!? Black threatens ...Nf5 right away, without taking directly on f3. [18...Bxf3 19.Bxf3 Na5∞ followed by ...Nf5 or ...Nc4.] 19.Nd2 Bxe2 20.Nxe2 Nf5³



Position after: 20...Nf5³

Black is fine again and could even look for an advantage because of his more compact pawn structure.

A2) 15.Qd2 Bxf3 16.Bxf3 e6[∞] Cornette, D (2433) – Chabanon, J (2437) Brest 2019.

A3) 15.Ne5 Bxe2 16.Nxc6 [After 16.Qxe2!? Nxe5 17.dxe5 White doesn't lose material but whether he is happy with the change in the pawn structure is another question. At any rate, the machine judges this as equal.] 16...bxc6 17.Nxe2 [17.Qxe2 e5= Arencibia Rodriguez, W (2526) – Panjwani, R (2409) Ottawa 2013] 17...e6 18.a4 Ne7 19.Ng3



Position after: 19.Ng3

At this stage, rather than 19...f6 from Lu, S (2619) – Zhou, J (2612) China 2016, Black could have marginally improved with 19...h5!=.

B) 11.c5! Nc8



Position after: 11...Nc8

B1) 12.h3 Nc6 13.a3 Black can trade his light-squared bishop anyway with 13...Be4 [13...e5!?] and 14.Be2 Bxf3 15.Bxf3 e6³ which was nice for Black in the internet game Guezou (2285) – Nouki13 (2608) Europe-Echecs 2020.

B2) 12.b4! White can't escape his fate, so he'd better start his own active play rather than take useless prophylactic measures. 12...a6 13.a4 Bg4 14.Be2 Nc6 15.b5 axb5 16.axb5 Na5 17.0-0



Position after: 17.0-0

17...e6 [In the event of 17...Bxf3 18.Bxf3 e6 19.Be2 Ne7 White has 20.Na4!, which would be a bit irritating.] 18.Na4 [18.Nd2 was perhaps a bit more testing.] Now instead of 18...Qe8 Schroeder, J (2529) – Zhang, Z (2641) Dubai 2017, Black could probably have equalized with 18...Nc4! 19.Bxc4 Bxf3 20.Qxf3 Rxa4=, although 20.gxf3 deserves attention.

11.Be2



Position after: 11.Be2

11...d5

11...e6?! unnecessarily allows White the extra option of 12.d5! e5?! [12...exd5! looks like the lesser evil to me 13.Nxd5 Nc6 14.0-0²] 13.0-0 Bxf3 14.Bxf3 Na6 15.Be2 f5 16.f3 Black enjoyed a neat edge in Baklan, V (2647) – Nakamura, H (2670) France 2008.

12.c5 Nc8 13.b4



Position after: 13.b4

At this juncture 13...a6 is possibly the most accurate and could transpose into 10...d5 11.c5 Nc8 12.b4. Indeed, White could achieve b4-b5 anyway, but after 14.a4 Nc6 15.b5 axb5 16.axb5 Na5 the a-file has been opened for the black rook.

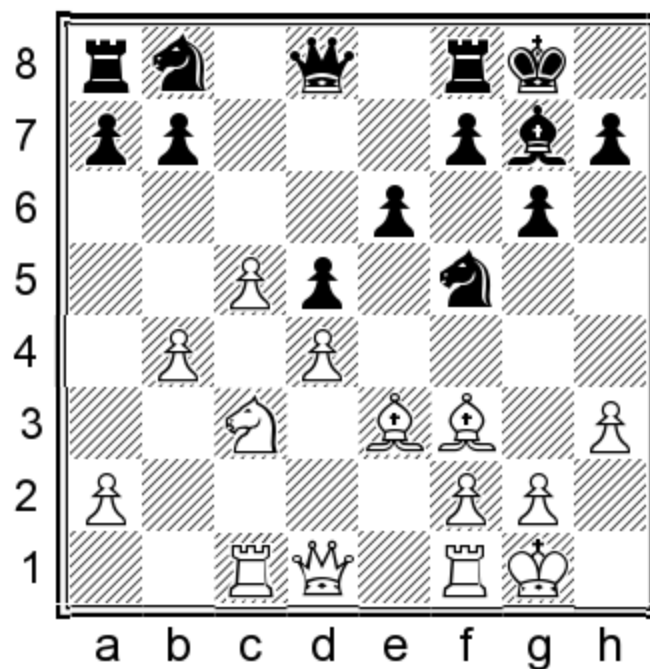
13...e6

13...Nc6 14.b5 Na5 15.0-0 Bxf3 16.Bxf3 e6 17.Be2 Ne7 18.Bd3 Nf5
19.Ne2?! Nakamura, H – Zinchenko, Y Dos Hermanas Blitz ICC 2010
[19.Bxf5!²].

14.0-0

14.b5!? seems more challenging to me, but perhaps Black doesn't really care and continues in the same vein: 14...Ne7 15.0-0 Nf5 followed by ...a6xb5 and then ...Nd7, and likely swaps on f3 and/or e3.

14...Ne7 15.h3 Bxf3 16.Bxf3 Nf5=



Position after: 16...Nf5=

Shcherbakov, R (2516) – Yuffa, D (2563) Sochi 2018.

Conclusion: I find 9...Bf5 undoubtedly more combative than 9...e5. Even though theory has shown ways for Black to gradually neutralize his opponent's pull in the endgame ensuing after 10.dxe5 dxe5 11.Qxd8 Rxd8,

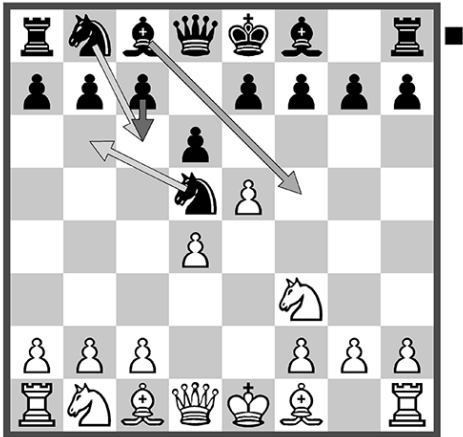
Black's hopes to play for a win are quite slim there. It's worth mentioning that 9...Bf5 can also be followed by ...e7-e5, depending on White's answer, which could result in a favorable version for Black of the Voronezh endgame.

Finally, as a matter of curiosity, Black reaches the same type of positions in our main line that he does after a completely different variation, namely 1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.Nf3 Bg4 5.Be2 e6 6.0-0 Be7 7.c4 Nb6 8.exd6 cxd6 9.Nc3 0-0 10.Be3 Nc6 11.b3 d5 12.c5 Nc8 and so on.

Chapter 6

Modern Variation with 4...--

1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.Nf3



Chapter Guide

Chapter 6 – Modern Variation with 4...--

1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.Nf3

a) 4...Bf5

b) 4...Nb6

c) 4...c6 5.exd6, 5.Be2

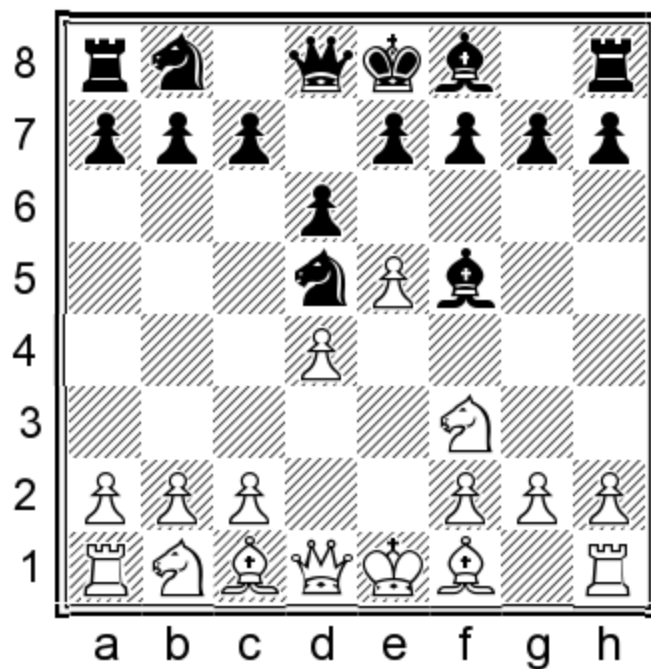
d) 4...c6 5.c4

e) 4...Nc6 5.--

f) 4...Nc6 5.c4

a) 4...Bf5

1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.Nf3 Bf5

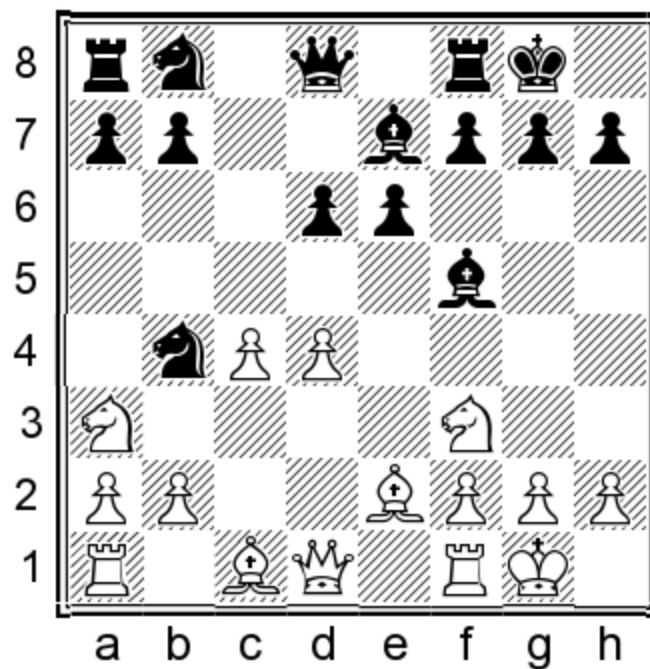


Position after: 4...Bf5

5.Bd3!

Simple and effective. White is spoilt for choice here, but other moves are clearly less challenging.

A) After the misguided 5.c4?! Nb4! White already has to be careful to keep the balance. 6.Na3 [6.Qa4+? N8c6 7.Na3 e6³ Kosteniuk, A (2557) – Goryachkina, A (2486) Riyadh (rapid) 2017] 6...e6 7.exd6 cxd6 8.Be2 Be7 9.0-0 0-0=

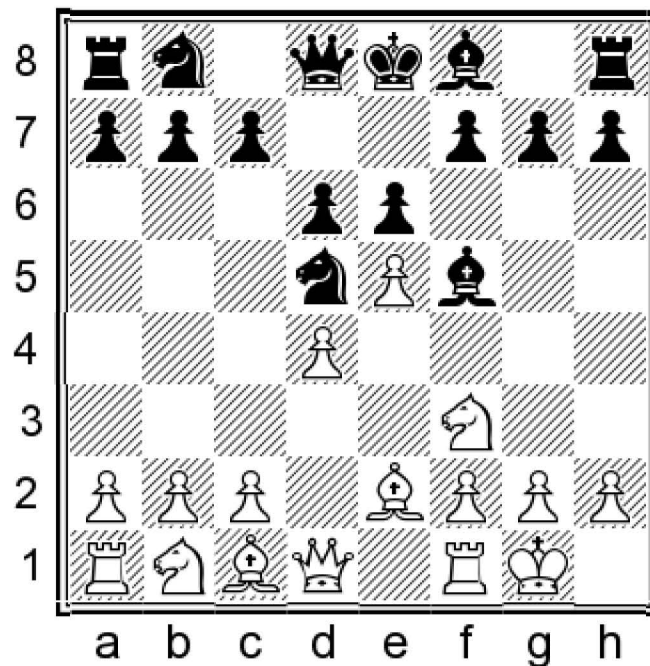


Position after: 9...0-0=

Fedorchuk, S (2570) – Brochet, P (2388) Evry 2005. The white knight is misplaced on a3 but this factor is not enough to give Black an edge.

B) 5.exd6 exd6 [5...Qxd6!?!; 5...cxd6!?!] 6.c3 Abdumalik, Z (2449) – Goryachkina, A (2486) Riyadh (blitz) 2017 was pretty harmless.

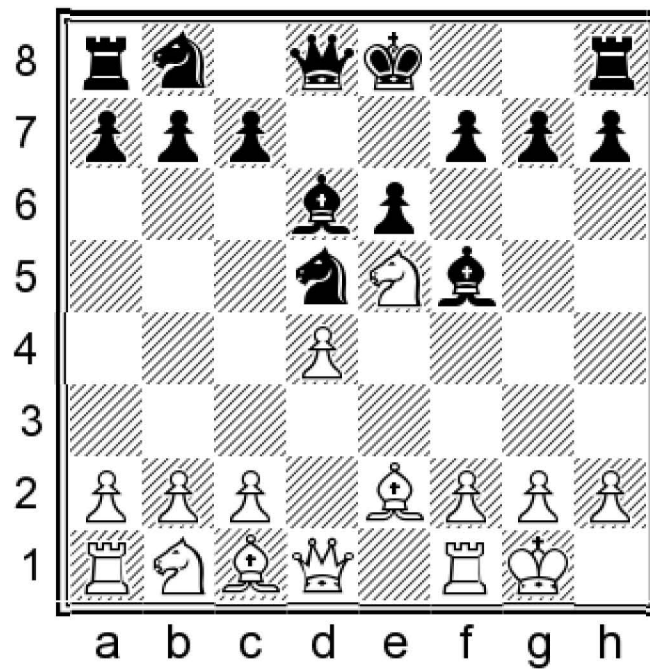
C) 5.Be2 e6 6.0-0



Position after: 6.0-0

C1) 6...Be7?! 7.c4 Nb6 8.Nc3 0-0 9.b3?! [9.exd6! cxd6 10.Qb3²] 9...dxe5 10.Nxe5 N8d7 [10...c5 is the engine's suggestion but White remains a tad better after 11.Be3.] 11.Nf3² Nguyen, TDV – Bartel, M Prague 2019.

C2) 6...dxe5! 7.Nxe5 [7.dxe5 Nc6=] 7...Bd6 Black has achieved a favorable version of the line 1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.Nf3 dxe5 5.Nxe5 c6 since he has developed a piece instead of playing ...c7-c6. There seem to be no defects and although White has a bunch of options here, Black appears to be OK in all cases. Here are some examples.



Position after: 7...Bd6

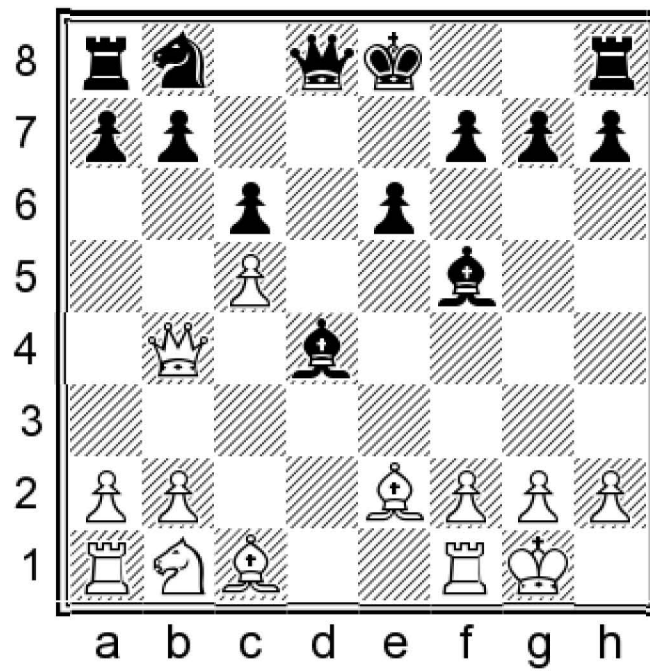
C2.1) 8.Nc4 0-0 9.Nxd6 cxd6= Zhu, C (2423) – Goryachkina, A (2486) Riyadh (blitz) 2017.

C2.2) 8.a3 h6?! [8...Bxe5 9.dxe5 Nc6=] 9.c4² Shuvalova, P (2385) – Goryachkina, A (2486) Riyadh (rapid) 2017.

C2.3) 8.f4!? 0-0 9.g4 Bxe5 10.dxe5 Be4[∞]

C2.4) 8.g4 Bg6 9.f4 Qh4[∞]

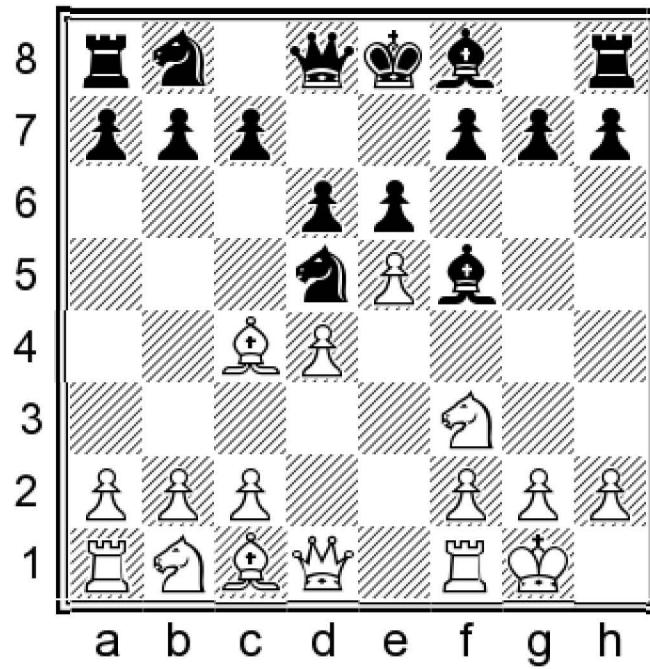
C2.5) 8.c4!? Nb4! 9.Qa4+ c6 10.c5 Bxe5 11.Qxb4 Bxd4



Position after: 11...Bxd4

Now White should pick one move from 12.Nd2, 12.Qxb7 and 12.Rd1, when chances are about equal.

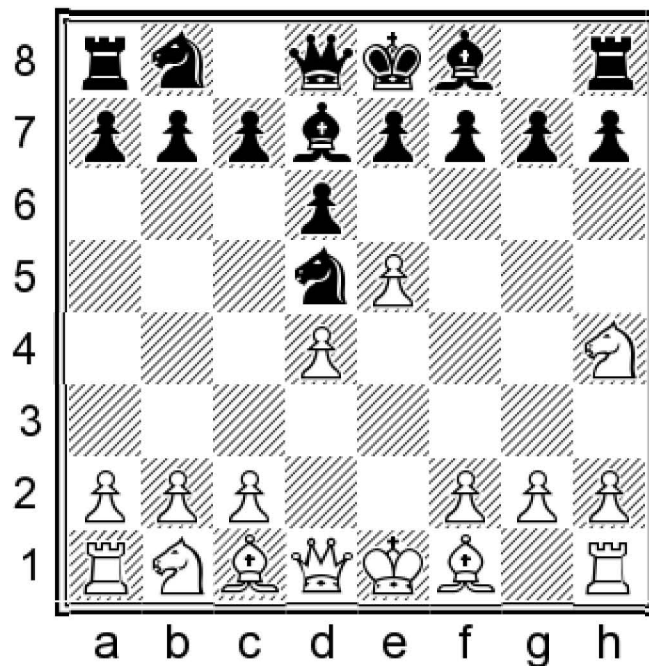
D) 5.Bc4 e6 6.0-0



Position after: 6.0-0

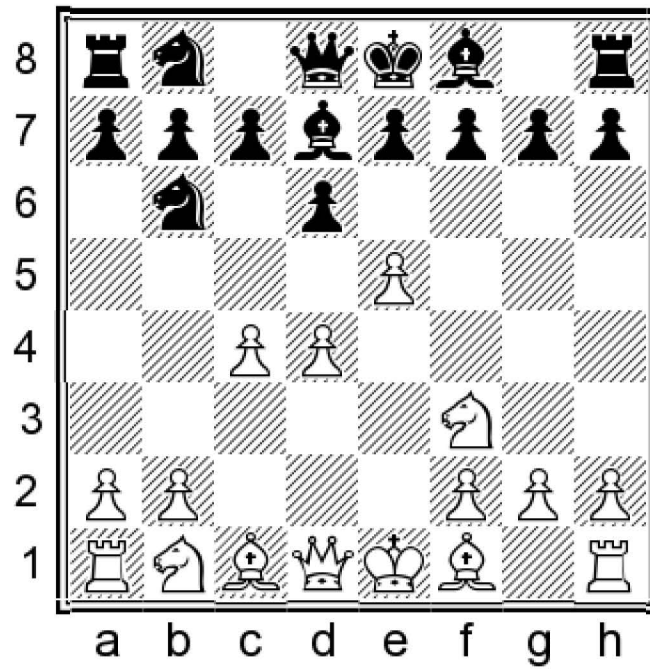
This was seen in Gunina, V (2507) – Goryachkina, A (2491) Moscow (blitz) 2018, where rather than 6...Be7, 6...dxe5 7.Nxe5 Bd6 seems more enterprising.

E) 5.Nh4!? Bd7



Position after: 5...Bd7

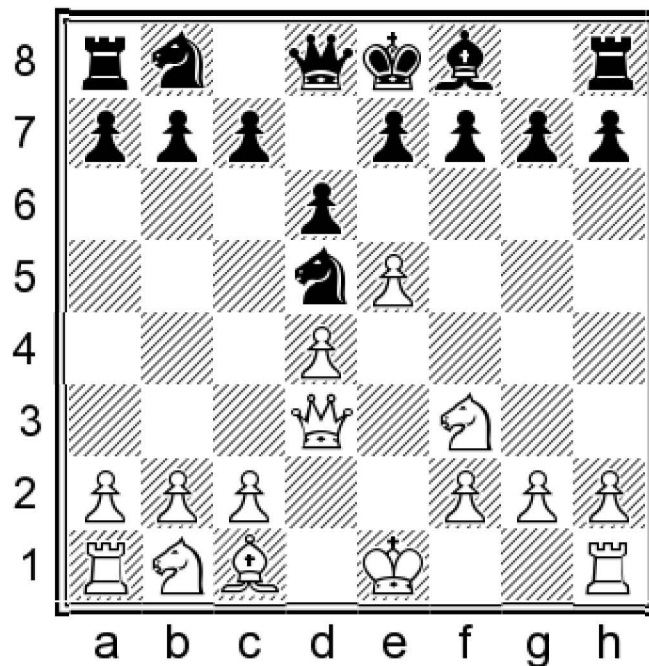
6.c4! [6.g3 dxe5 7.dxe5 Nb4 8.Bg2 Bc6 9.Bd2 Bxg2 10.Nxg2 e6= was balanced in Gulbas, C (2394) – Brochet, P (2368) France 2005, which Black surprisingly won just eight moves later] 6...Nb6 7.Nf3 Perhaps White can count on a slight edge here too, but it is in my opinion more questionable than after 5.Bd3! [7.f4!? dxe5 8.fxe5 e6 9.Nf3 Ba4 10.b3 Bc6∞ having provoked b2-b3 is useful if Black then follows up with ...Bb4+ because White is deprived of the answer Nb1-c3].



Position after: 7.Nf3

I would probably choose 7...g6 here, but 7...dxe5 8.Nxe5 Nc6 or 7...Bg4 and 7...Bf5 are all sensible too.

5...Bxd3 6.Qxd3



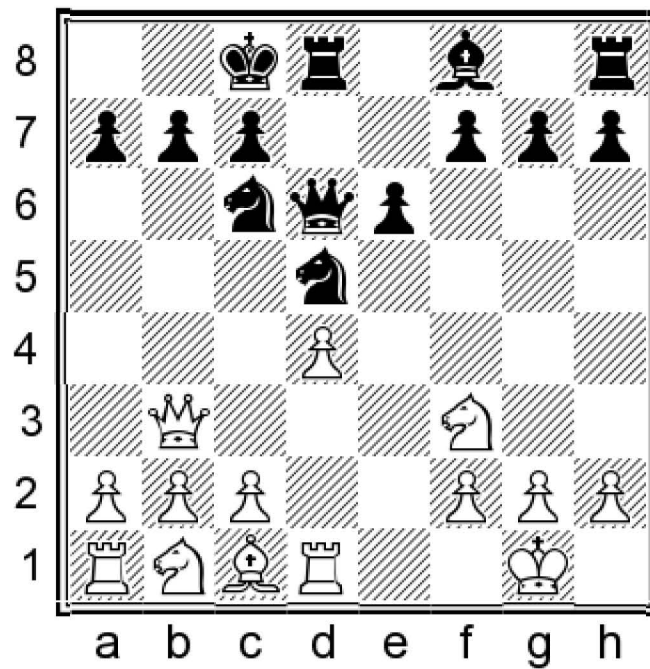
Position after: 6.Qxd3

6...e6

A) 6...Qd7 7.0-0 e6 This happened in Yeletsky, I (2406) – Vavulin, M (2575) Moscow 2018, where White had a little edge following 8.Qb3². He could have been more ambitious and opted for 8.c4! Nb6 9.Nc3 Nc6 10.exd6. Black can now recapture either ...cxd6 (10...cxd6) when 11.d5! opens up the center and earns White a neat edge, or 10...Bxd6. Then 11.c5? is misguided in view of the obvious ...Bxc5 (11...Bxc5), but simple development also results in quite a pleasant game for White.

B) 6...Nc6

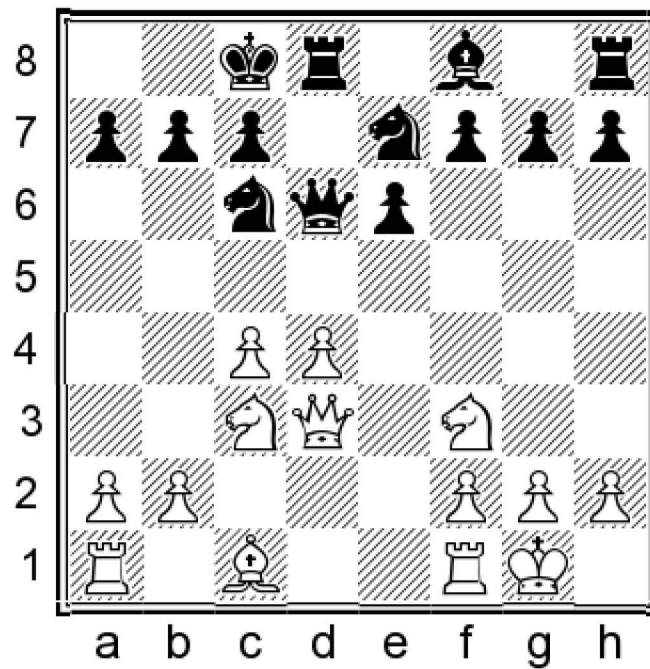
B1) 7.Qb3 e6 8.exd6 Qxd6 9.0-0 0-0-0 10.Rd1



Position after: 10.Rd1

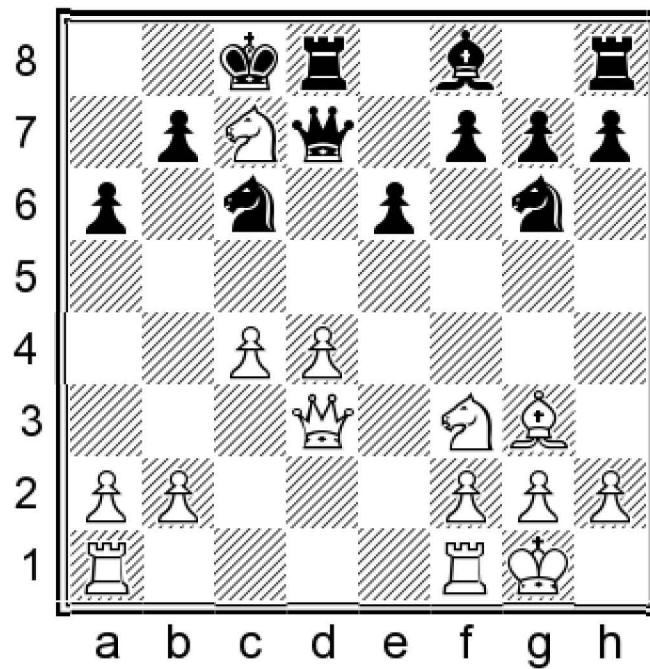
This was So, W (2577) – Dzhumaev, M (2549) Vung Tau 2008 where in place of 10...Nf4?! 11.Nc3² Black could have kept the game unclear with the aid of 10...Nb6, intending to meet 11.a4 with 11...Qd5 and 11.c4 with 11...Qb4.

B2) 7.0-0 e6 [7...dxe5!? doesn't alter the ² assessment.] 8.c4 Nde7 [8...Ndb4? 9.Qe2 dxe5 runs into the intermediate move 10.a3!±.] 9.exd6 Qxd6 10.Nc3 0-0-0



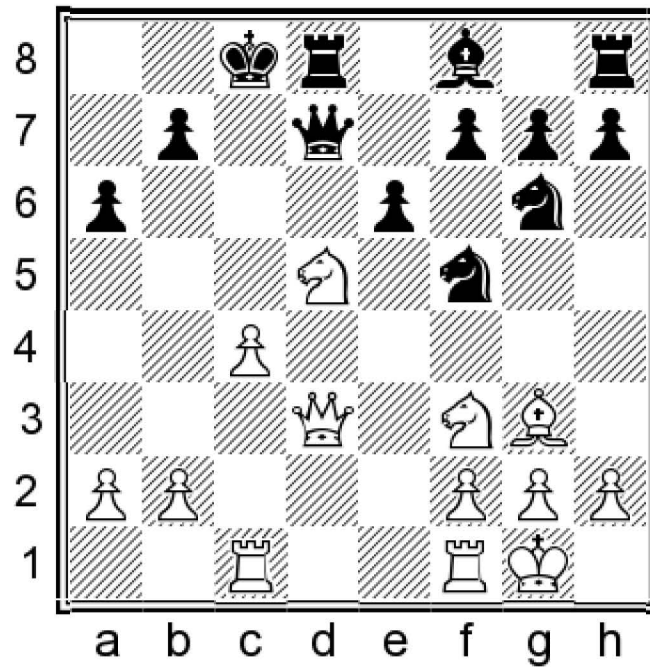
Position after: 10...0-0-0

11.Nb5 [The ensuing tactical sequence is not necessarily in White's favor, so the calm 11.Rd1 was probably superior.] 11...Qd7 12.Bf4 a6 13.Nxc7 White has snatched an important pawn and his knight will escape, but that is not the end of the story. 13...Ng6 14.Bg3



Position after: 14.Bg3

14...Nxd4! [14...Bd6 15.Na8! proved slightly better for White in Bobras, P (2554) – Dzhumayev, M (2529) Cappelle-la-Grande 2009] 15.Rac1? For a split of second the engine is enthusiastic about this move, until it discovers 15...Nf5 16.Nd5

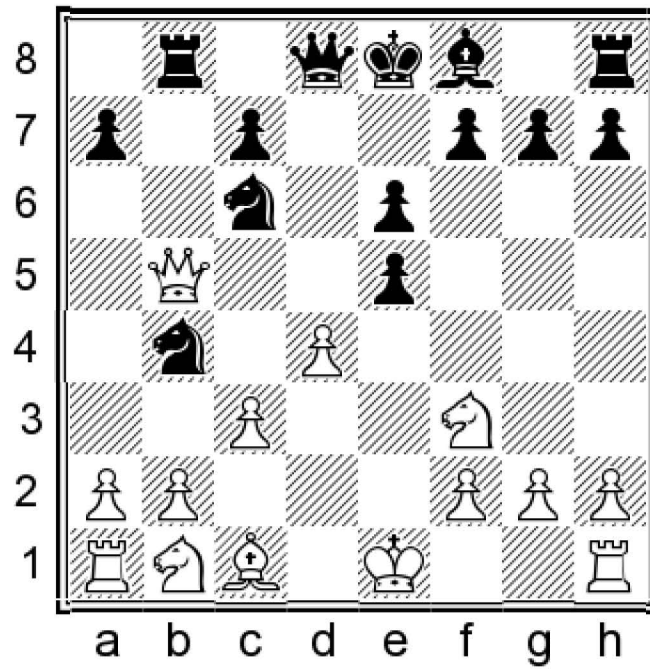


Position after: 16.Nd5

16...Nxb3!! 17.Nb6+ Kc7 18.Nxd7 Nf4!μ when White must give back his extra queen. 15.Na8! is correct and seemingly about equal.

7.0-0

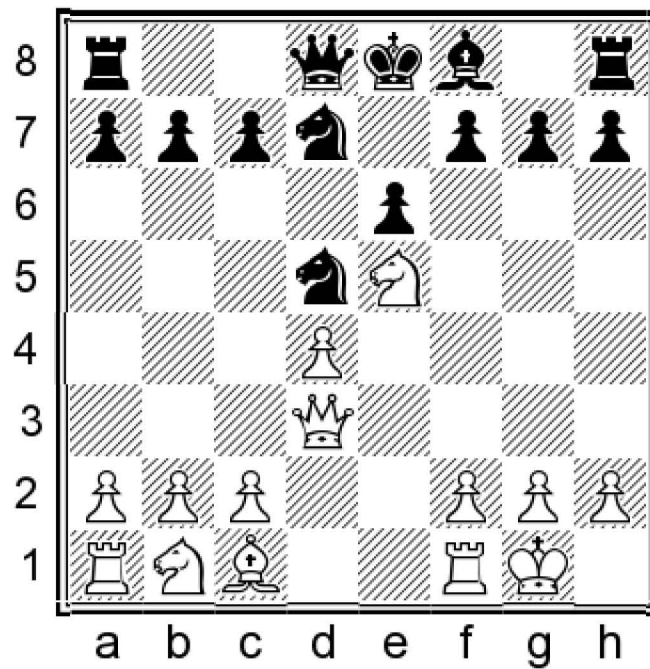
Going on a pawn-snatching expedition with 7.Qb5+!? Nc6 8.Qxb7 isn't stupid, but ultimately it only results in a mess. 8...Ndb4 9.Qb5 dxe5 10.c3 Rb8



Position after: 10...Rb8

11.Qe2 Qd5 12.cxb4 Bxb4 [worse is 11.Qa4? Nd3+ 12.Ke2 Qd7!μ when the brave 13.Kxd3?! Nb4+ only accelerates White's demise]

7...dxe5 8.Nxe5 Nd7



Position after: 8...Nd7

9.c4?!

Too hasty.

The preparatory 9.Qe2² gives White a stable edge.

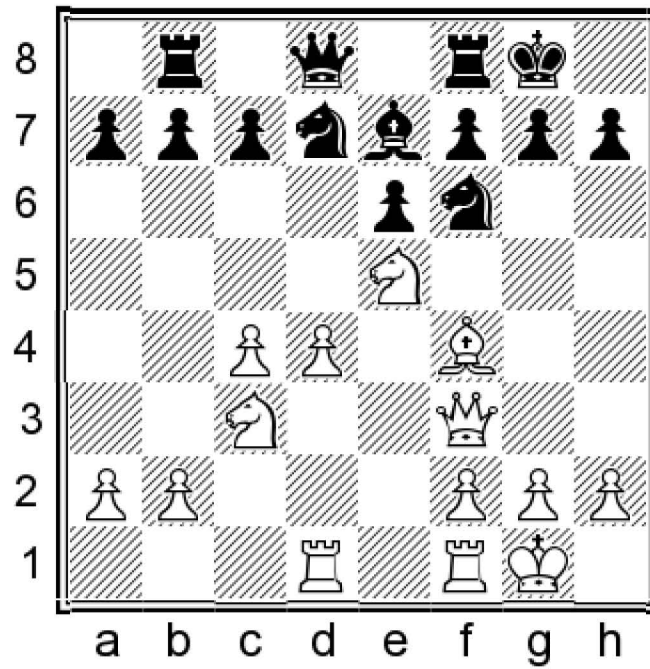
9...N5f6?!

9...Nxe5! 10.dxe5 Nb4 Black would have equalized this way, for if 11.Qe4 then 11...Bc5 with ideas of ...Qd4 or ...Qd3 now that Black is only one move away from castling.

10.Qf3 Rb8?!

10...c5!²

11.Nc3 Be7 12.Bf4 0-0 13.Rad1±

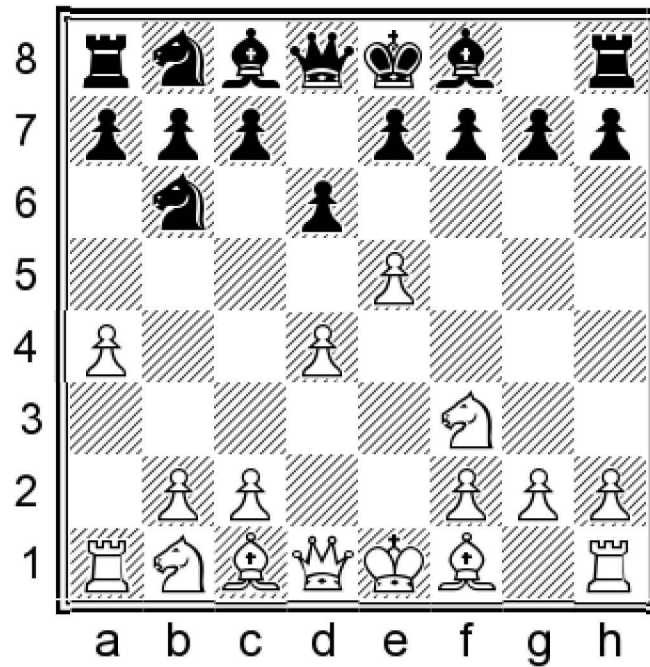


Position after: 13.Rad1±

White was clearly better in Lagno, K (2547) – Goryachkina, A (2486) Riyadh (blitz) 2017.

b) 4...Nb6

1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.Nf3 Nb6?! 5.a4!



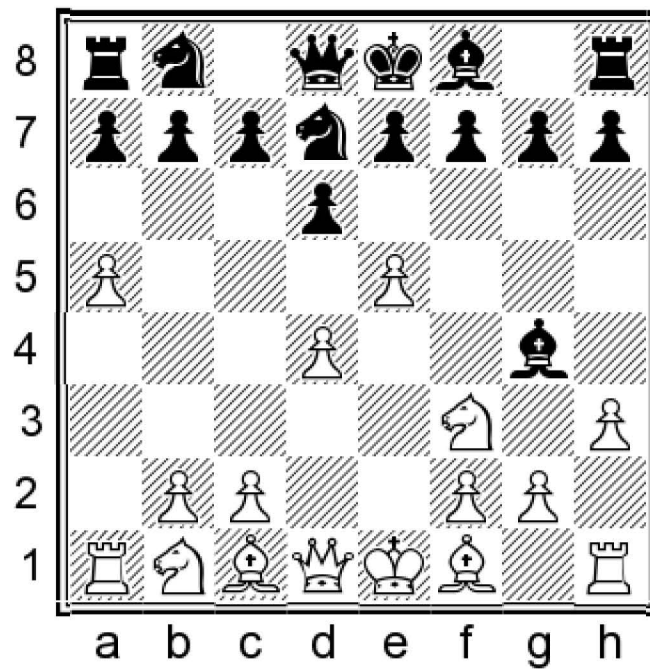
Position after: 5.a4!

Obviously many moves are playable here, and some of them may even lead to a small white edge, but this one is clearly critical if White wants to punish his opponent's illogical retreat.

5...a5

Stopping the a-pawn's march is best.

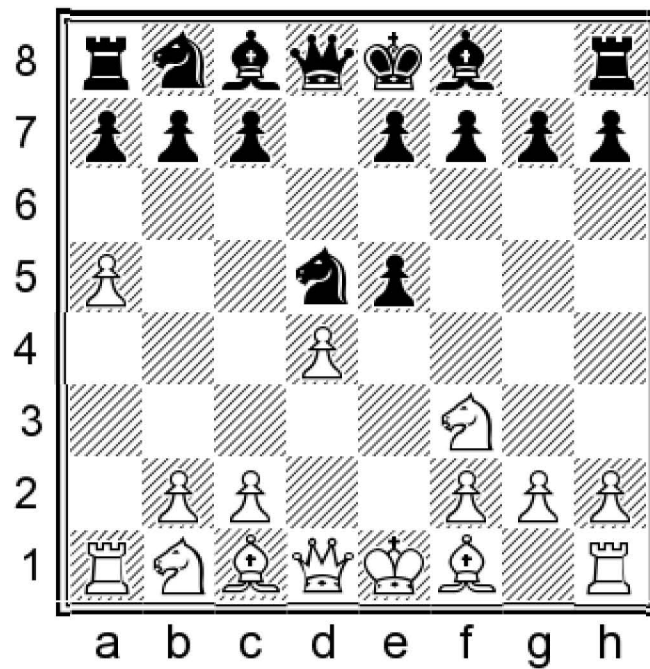
A) 5...Bg4?! 6.a5 N6d7 7.h3



Position after: 7.h3

7...Bh5 [Or 7...Bxf3 8.Qxf3 Nc6 9.Be3 with the threat of a5-a6.] 8.g4 Bg6
Now the typical pawn sacrifice 9.e6± is very promising for White.

B) 5...dxe5!? 6.a5 [6.Nxe5 is playable too, of course, but inserting a4-a5 seems in most cases advantageous for White.] 6...Nd5



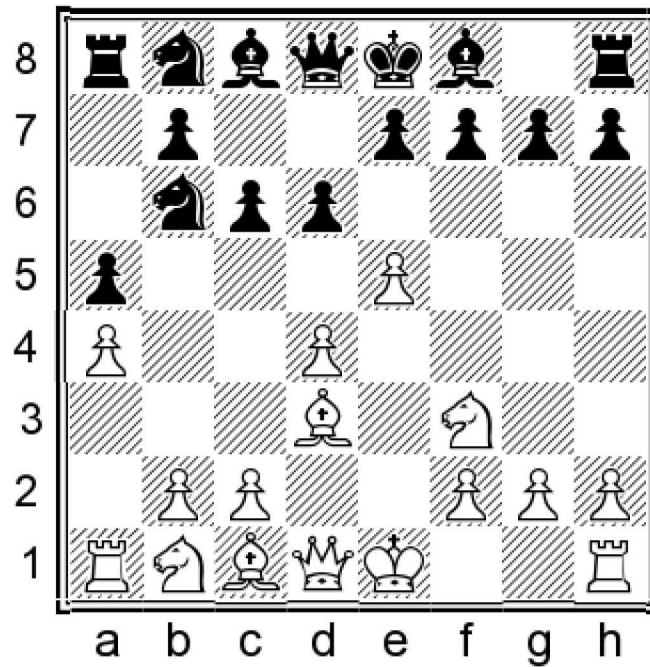
Position after: 6...Nd5

I couldn't find any game that reached this exact position in the database!
Even if White would be left in unknown territory there, I can hardly advise
Black to give it a try. 7.dxe5 is at least ², so is 7.Nxe5.

6.Nc3

John Shaw's recommendation in the first volume of *Playing 1.e4*.

6.Bb5+ c6 7.Bd3

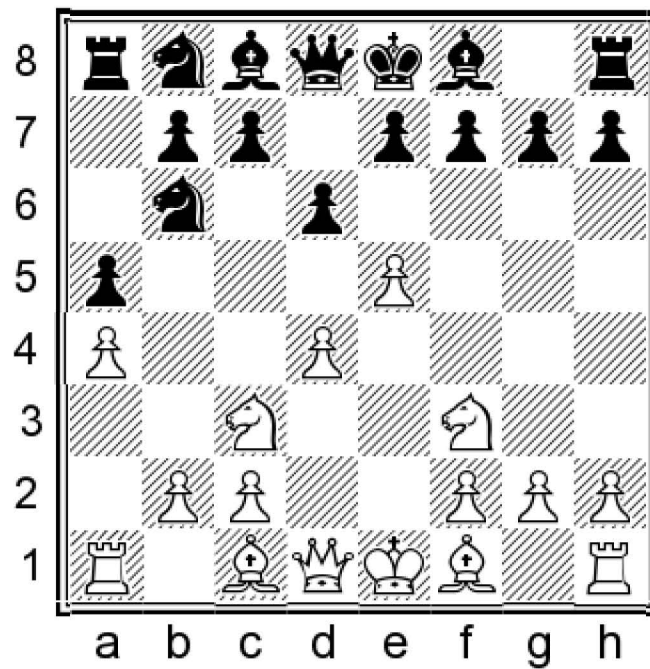


Position after: 7.Bd3

A) 7...Bg4 8.h3 Bxf3 9.Qxf3 dxe5 10.dxe5 e6 11.Nc3 N8d7 12.Bf4 [12.Qg3!?] 12...Bb4 [12...Nc5 13.0-0 Nd5 perhaps this line brings Black closer to equality] 13.Qg3 Qc7 14.0-0² Halwick, F (2434) – Arndt, S (2186) IECG email 2002.

B) 7...dxe5 8.Nxe5 g6 [8...Qxd4? 9.Nxf7! should be avoided.] 9.0-0 Bg7 10.c3 0-0 11.Re1 Be6 12.Bf4 Nd5 13.Bg3 Nd7 Lorentzen, O – Van Kempen, H email 2000, which was a decent version of the 1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.Nf3 dxe5 5.Nxe5 g6 line.

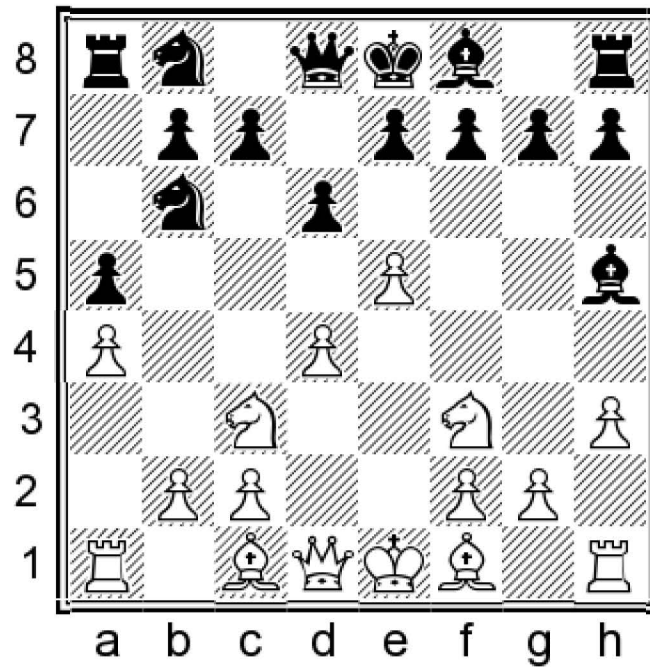
Black has plenty of moves after our main line 6.Nc3.



Position after: 6.Nc3

6...g6

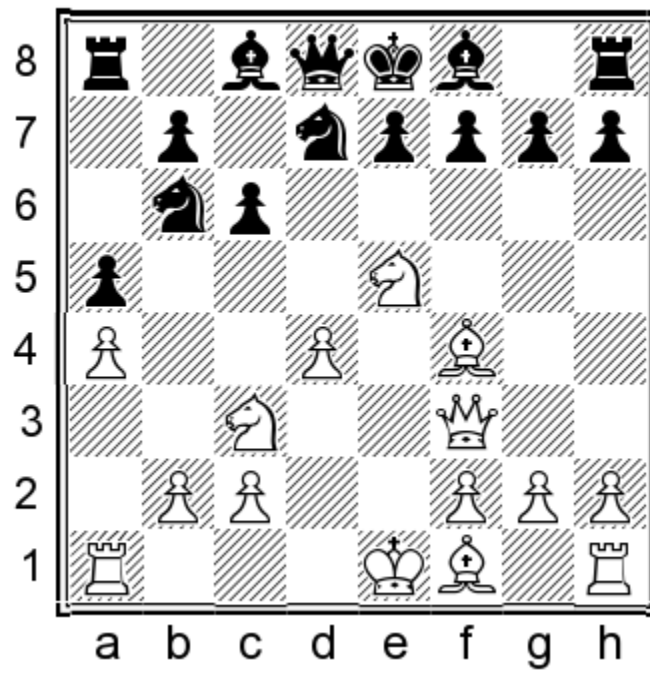
A) 6...Bg4? This line is reminiscent of 1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Ng8 3.d4 d6 4.Nf3 Bg4. Having his knight at b6 rather than g8 doesn't help Black a great deal. 7.h3 Bh5



Position after: 7...Bh5

8.d5! [or 8.g4 Bg6 9.e6 fxe6 10.Ng5±] 8...Bxf3 9.Qxf3 dxe5 10.Be3,
White gained more than ample compensation in the old game Bielczyk, J
(2380) – Doda, Z (2405) Krakow 1978.

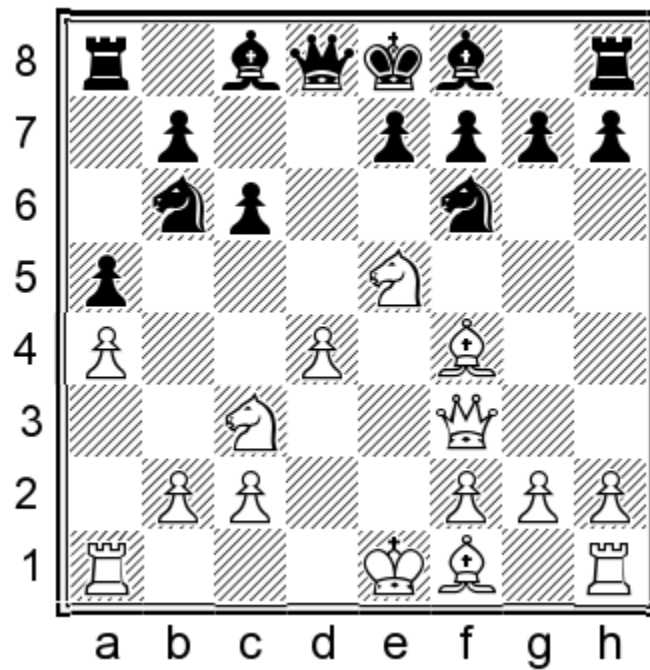
B) 6...c6 7.Bf4 dxe5 8.Nxe5 N8d7 9.Qf3 [9.Bd3!? from Mastrovasilis, D
(2607) – Suba, M (2471) Brasov 2011, is mentioned by Shaw as being a
worthy alternative.]



Position after: 9.Qf3

B1) 9...Nxe5 10.dxe5 [10.Bxe5?! f6,,] 10...Be6 11.Qe3²

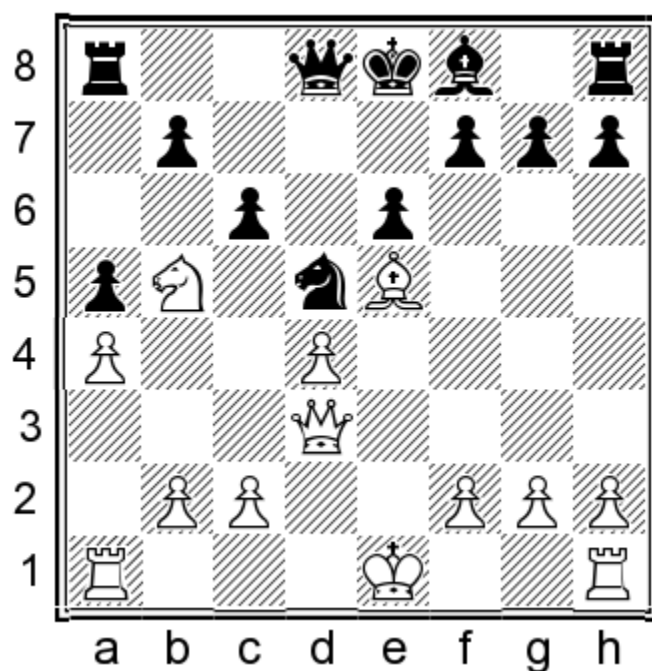
B2) 9...Nf6



Position after: 9...Nf6

10.d5!! Nbx d5 11.Nxd5 Qxd5 12.Bc4 Qxf3 13.Bxf7+ Kd8 14.gxf3+–
Hracek, Z (2632) – Konopka, M (2458) Ostrava 2010.

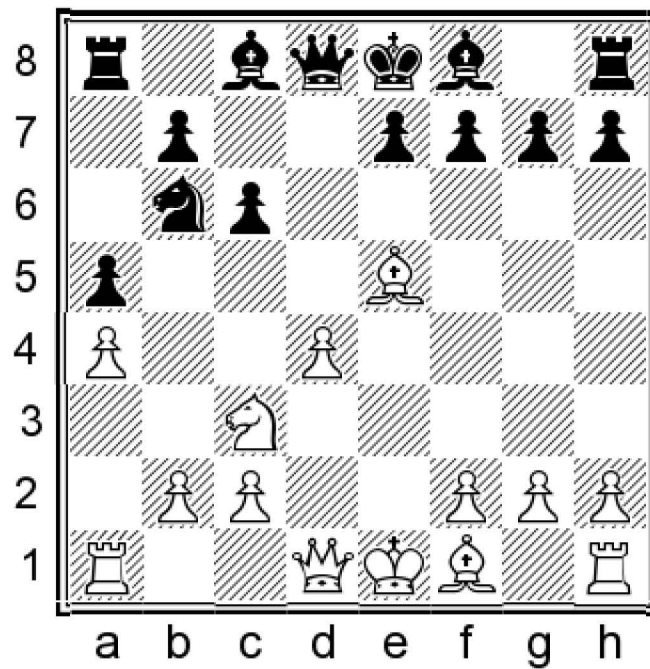
C) 6...Bf5 7.Bf4 [Perhaps White should have tried either the immediate 7.Bd3 or 7.d5.] 7...e6 8.Bd3 Bxd3 9.Qxd3 Nc6 10.Nb5 dxe5 11.Nxe5 Nd5 12.Bg3 Nxe5 13.Bxe5 c6



Position after: 13...c6

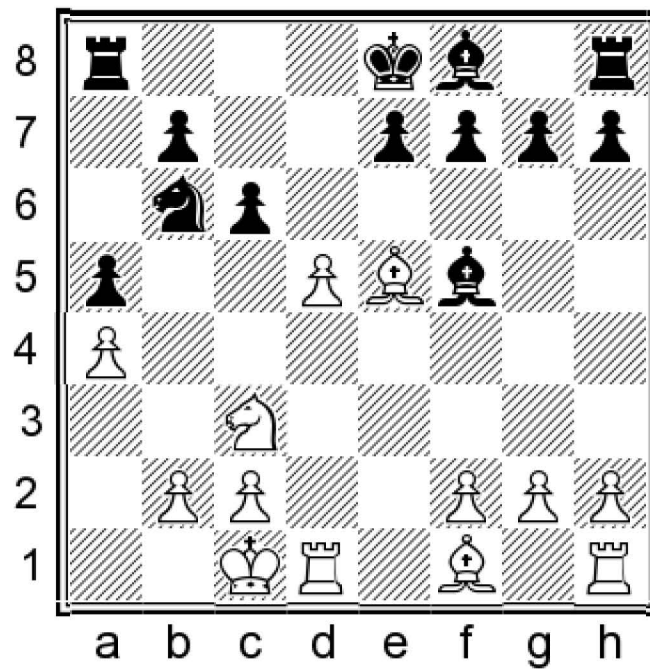
This proved quite OK for Black in Bagi, M (2367) – Varga, Z (2449)
Budapest 2013.

D) 6...dxe5 7.Nxe5 N8d7 8.Bf4 Nxe5 9.Bxe5 c6



Position after: 9...c6

10.Qh5 [10.Be2 Bf5 11.g4 Bg6 12.h4 h5 13.gxh5 Bf5∞ Adams, M (2680) – Drazic, S (2445) Koge 1997] 10...Qd7? [After this mistake the white advantage should already be decisive. Black should have tried either 10...Nd7 or 10...Be6 to put up a more stubborn resistance.] Now 11.d5 Qf5 12.Qxf5 Bxf5 13.0-0-0²

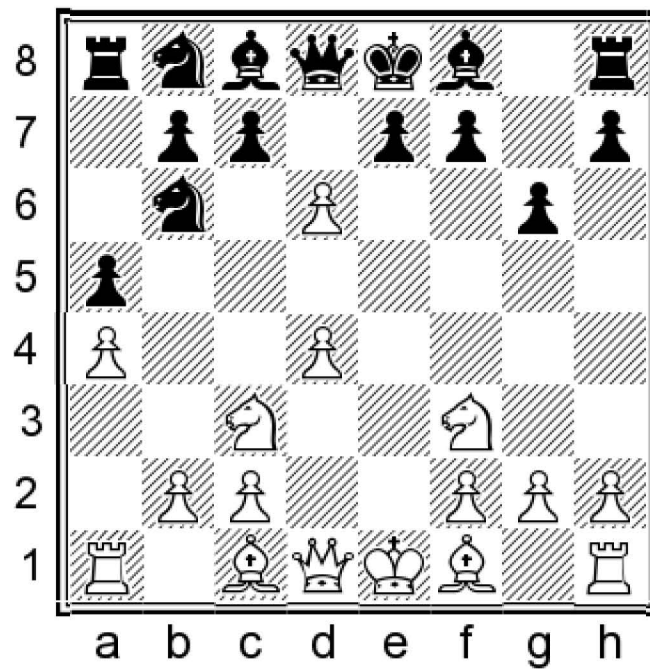


Position after: 13.0-0-0²

Oral, T (2516) – Sergeev, V (2434) Czech Republic 2006 gave White the initiative with no counterplay for Black, but Shaw's powerful improvement 11.Nb5! Nd5 12.Bc4 is virtually lost for Black.

7.exd6!

I find 7.Bb5+ less cunning. True, after 7...c6 8.Be2 White has deprived the black knight of its natural square, but ...c7-c6 fits into the black setup. 8...dxe5 9.Nxe5 Bg7 10.0-0 0-0 11.Bf4 Bf5 [11...N8d7!?!; 11...Na6!?!] 12.Re1 Na6∞ Michalik, P (2577) – Plat, V (2535) Ostrava 2019.



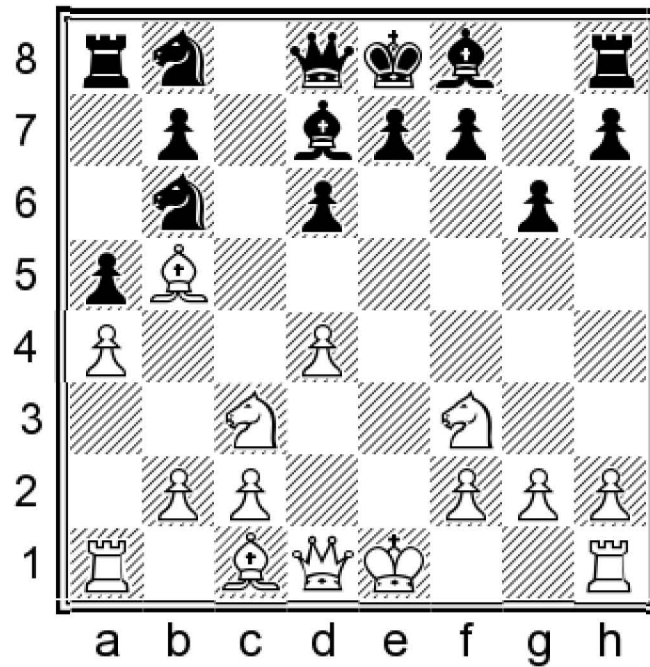
Position after: 7.exd6!

7...cxd6

A) 7...Qxd6 8.Nb5 Qd8 9.Bf4 Na6 10.Be5 f6 11.Bg3² Rublevsky, S (2670)
– Laketic, G (2500) Novi Sad 2000. There is nothing dramatic for Black here and after a subsequent ...c7-c6 his offside knight may be repatriated towards the center, but his pawn on f6 is a bit ugly.

B) 7...exd6 8.Bg5 Be7 [8...f6 9.Bf4²] 9.Bh6 Bf8 10.Qd2²

8.Bb5+ Bd7



Position after: 8...Bd7

9.Bg5

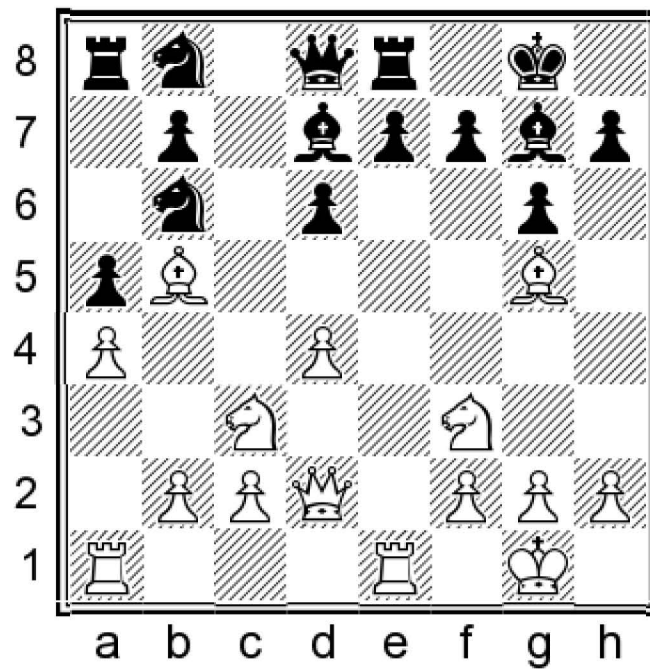
9.h4!?

A) 9...h5 10.Bg5! [On 10.Ng5 Bg7 11.Qf3 Black must temporarily sacrifice some material 11...0-0 12.Qxb7 Nc6! 13.Bxc6 Rb8©.] 10...Bg7 11.Qe2 Nc6 12.0-0-0² White exerts irritating pressure.

B) Maybe Black could seek an unclear game with the flexible 9...h6 10.Bf4 Bg7 11.Qd2 Na6 or 11...Nc6.

C) 9...Bxb5 10.Nxb5 Bg7 11.h5f Wahls, M (2540) – Chekhov, V (2535) Hamburg 1996.

9...Bg7 10.0-0 0-0 11.Re1 Re8 12.Qd2²

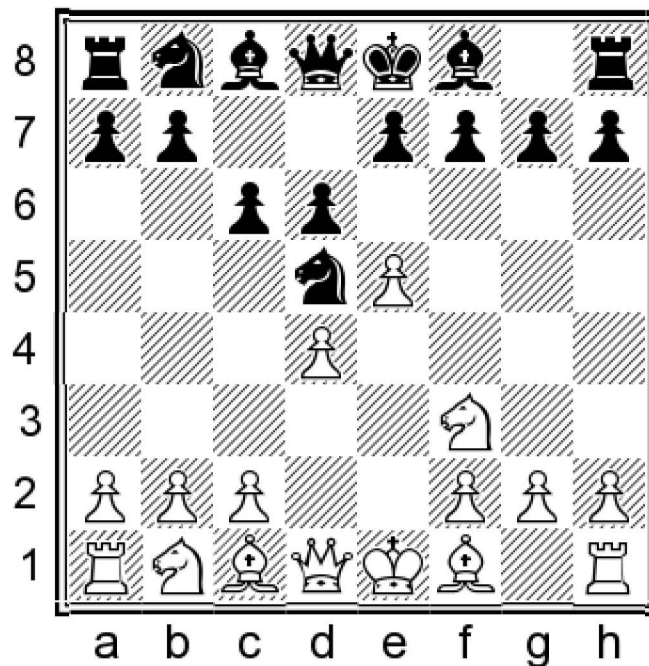


Position after: 12.Qd2²

White had some pressure and his opponent no counterplay in Sokolov, A (2563) – Krizsany, L (2437) Lenk 2003.

c) 4...c6 5.exd6, 5.Be2

1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.Nf3 c6



Position after: 4...c6

This secondary line, tried by, among others, Romanian GM Suba and Ukrainian IM Sergeev, has been used more recently by the Chinese GM Zhao Xue.

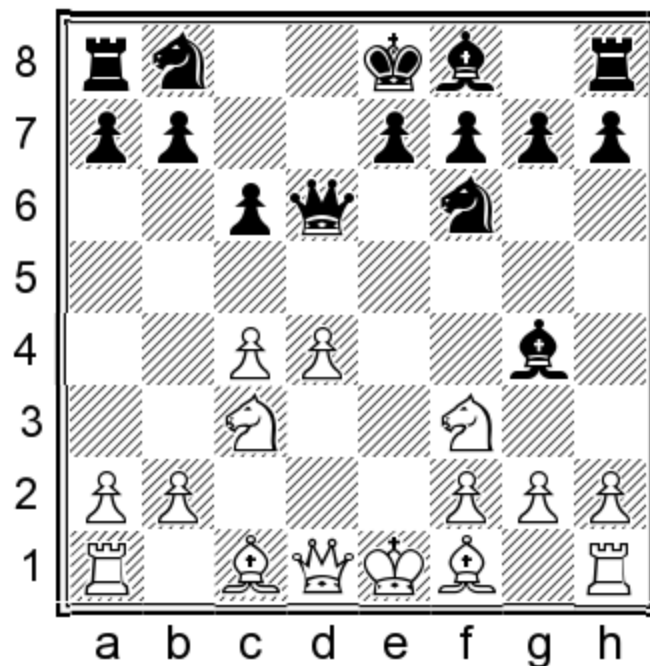
She has employed it repeatedly at fast time controls since 2013 and against the best female players, achieving quite a decent score. White is spoilt for choice here (which can prove tricky in rapid or blitz games) and if he certainly has several ways of getting a slight plus, this may vanish quickly after an inaccuracy or two.

5.Be2

In the event of this move, play is likely to transpose to another line covered elsewhere, notably 1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.Nf3 dxe5 5.Nxe5 c6, where Black has avoided more problematic options. Overall 5.Be2 seems rather harmless to me here.

5.exd6

A) 5...Qxd6 6.c4 Nf6 7.Nc3 Bg4

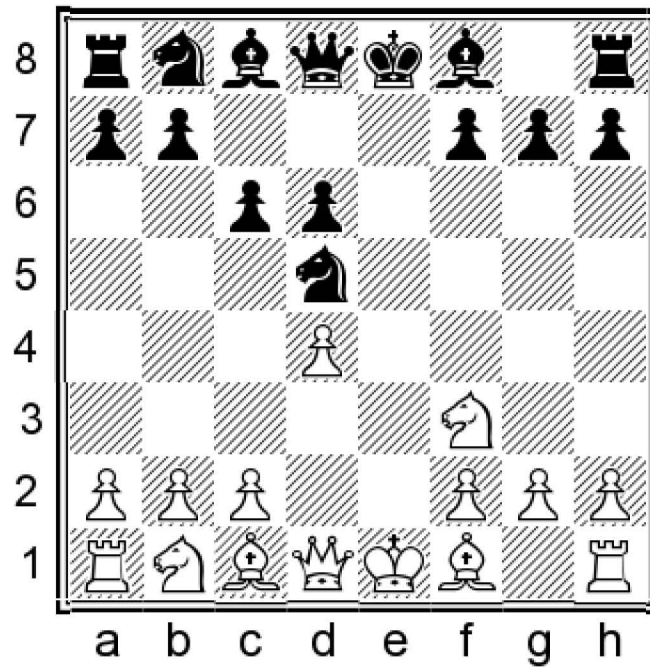


Position after: 7...Bg4

A1) 8.Qb3!? came into consideration, hoping for 8...Qc7 9.Bf4!. In that case, however, Black could probably afford the somewhat weakening 8...b6, while the sharp 8...Nbd7 9.Qxb7 Rb8 10.Qxa7 Bxf3 11.gxf3 e5 may be objectively good for White but not necessarily to everyone's taste.

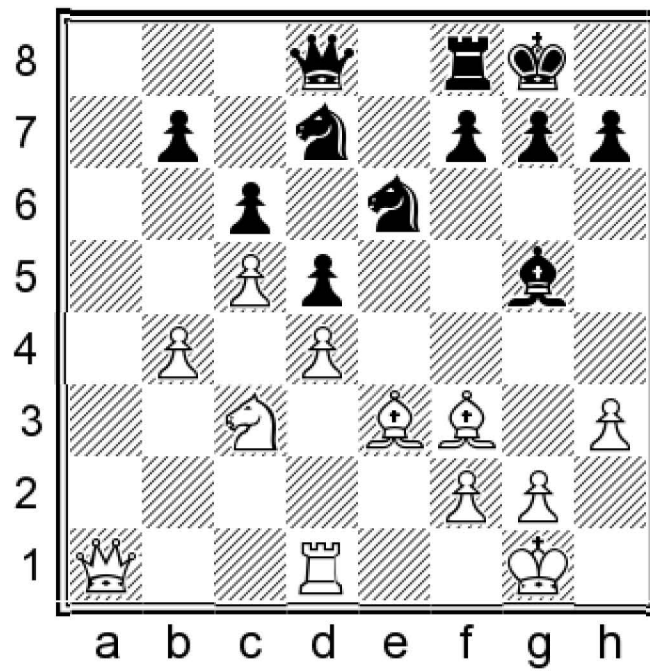
A2) 8.Be2 Nbd7 9.h3 Bh5 10.0-0 e6² Abdumalik, Z (2473) – Zhao Xue (2478) Khanty Mansiysk 2018. White stands a bit better owing to her space advantage but Black is pretty solid.

B) 5...exd6



Position after: 5...exd6

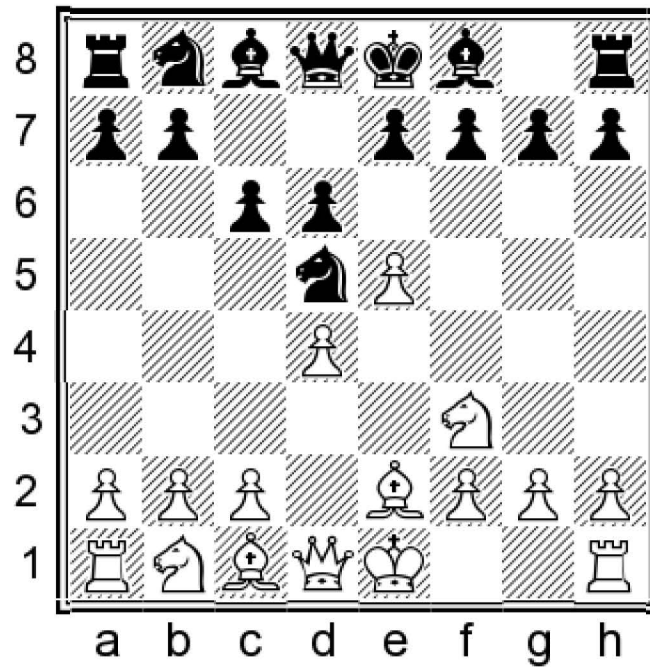
6.Be2 [Maybe 6.c4 followed by 7.Bd3 is a smarter idea.] We will now follow the game Baumegger, S (2495) – Baburin, A (2600) Vienna 1998, which is a nice example of how things can develop smoothly for Black:
 6...Be7 7.0-0 0-0 8.c4 Nc7 9.Nc3 d5 10.c5 Bg4 11.h3 Bxf3 12.Bxf3 Nd7 13.b4 Bf6 14.Be3 a5 15.a3 axb4 16.axb4 Rxa1 17.Qxa1 Ne6 18.Rd1 Bg5.



Position after: 18...Bg5

This is still balanced but the least one can say is that Black wasn't under any kind of pressure from the start of that game.

Back to 5.Be2.



Position after: 5.Be2

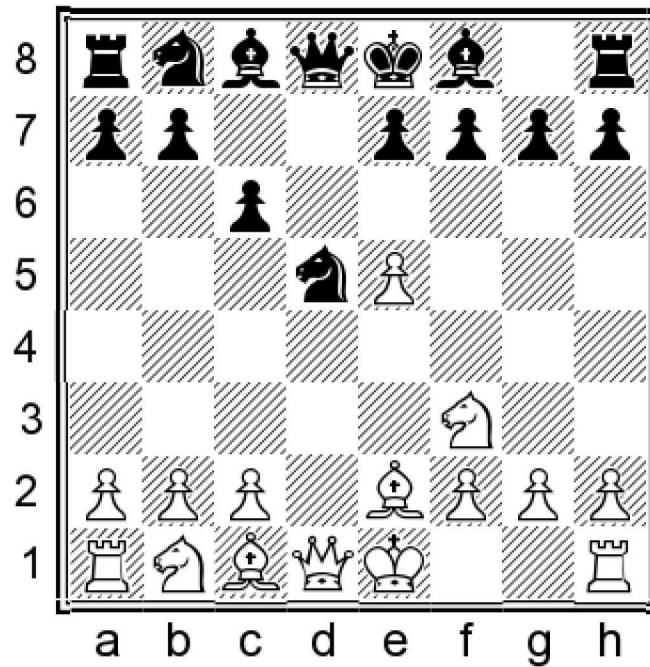
5...Bf5

Possibly the best follow-up. In comparison with 1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.Nf3 Bf5, the critical 5.Bd3 has been discarded.

A) 5...Bg4 with a transposition into 4....Bg4 5.Be2 c6 like in the recent encounter Solodovnichenko, Y (2553) – Sergeev, V (2423) Kiev 2020, for instance.

B) 5...dxe5

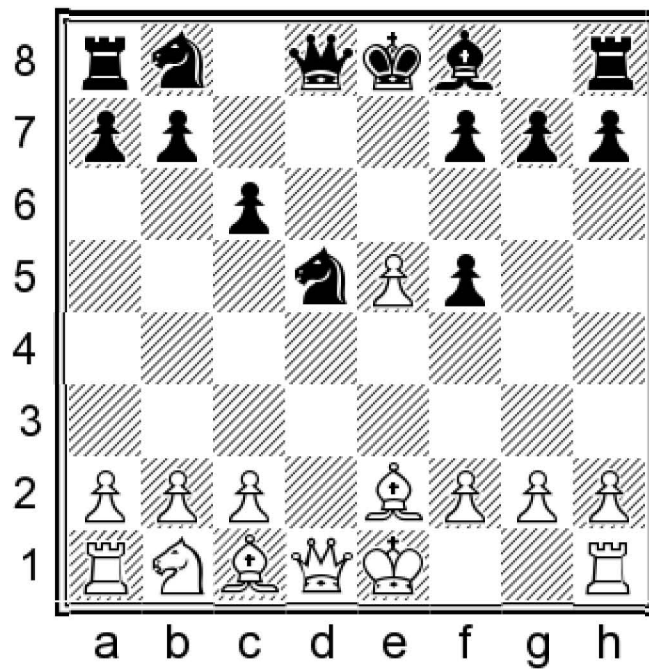
B1) 6.dxe5!?



Position after: 6.dxe5!?

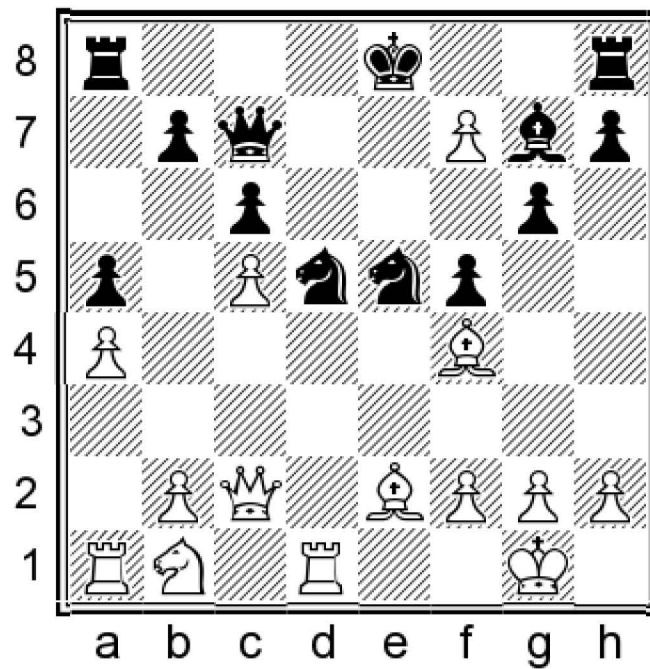
B1.1) 6...Bg4 transposes into the 4...Bg4 5.Be2 c6 line where Black might regret having captured on e5 before White had castled, since now 7.Ng5 and 7.c4 are worthy options.

B1.2) 6...Bf5 7.Nd4 e6! [I like this better than 7...Bg6 8.e6!f] 8.Nxf5 exf5



Position after: 8...exf5

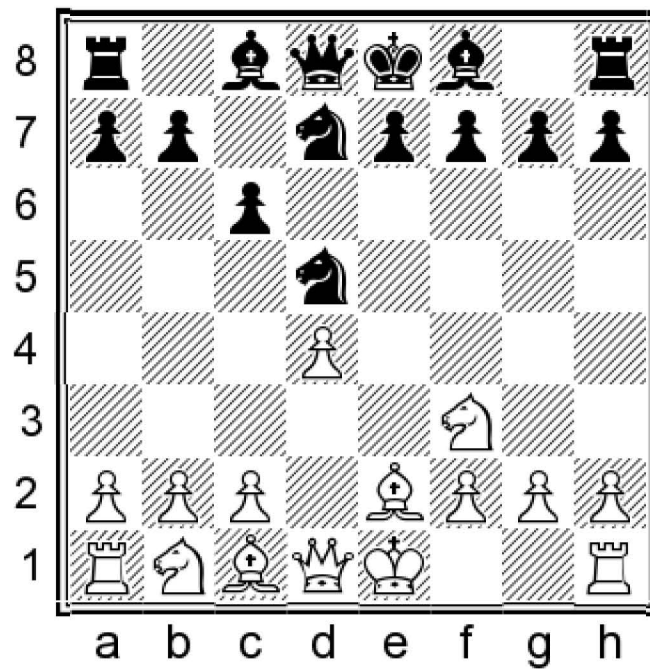
A curious position has arisen after only eight moves! 9.0-0 Nd7 10.c4
 This was White's choice in the correspondence game Ellinger, P (2420)
 – Dietrich, K (2264) email 2002, which quickly ended peacefully.
 [Instead 10.Bc4 Nc5 or 10...N7b6 deserved attention.] 10...N5b6
 [10...Nc7!? looks more natural to me, having in mind the relocation of
 the knight to e6.] 11.Qc2 g6 12.Rd1 Qc7 13.a4 a5 14.Bf4 Bg7 15.c5
 Nd5 16.e6 Ne5 17.exf7+ A draw was agreed in this roughly equal
 position.



Position after: 17.exf7+

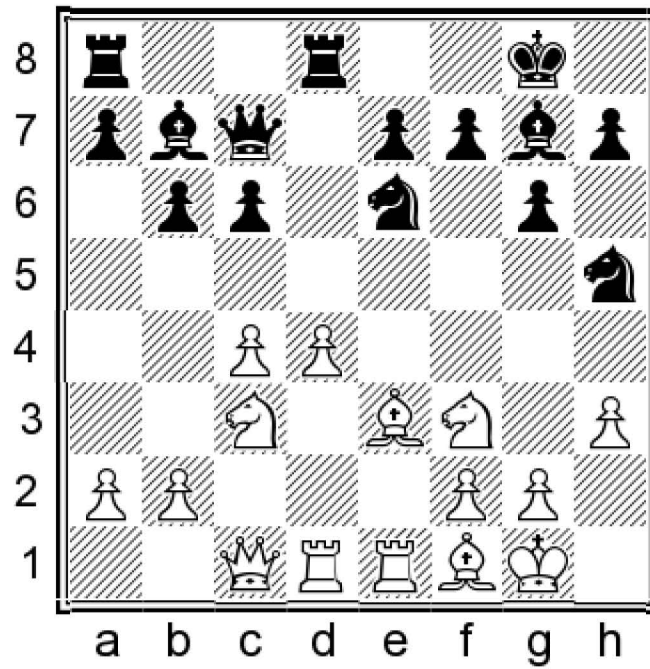
White could obviously have deviated earlier but though atypical, the position deriving from 8.Nxf5 exf5 seems quite playable for Black.

B2) 6.Nxe5 Nd7 [6...Bf5 transposes to 1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.Nf3 dxe5 5.Nxe5 c6 6.Be2 Bf5.] 7.Nf3



Position after: 7.Nf3

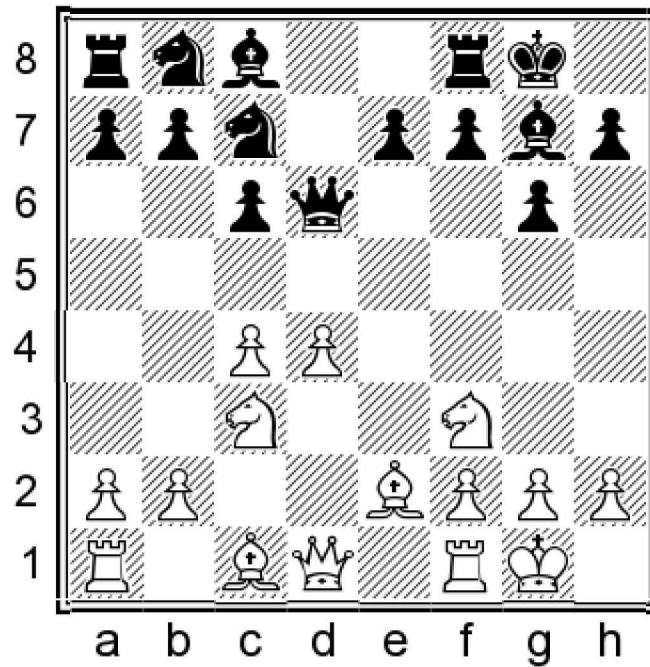
7...g6 [It is doubtful whether a setup based on 7...N7f6 followed by ...Bf5 and ...e6 would have made Black's life easier.] 8.0-0 Bg7 9.c4 Nc7 10.Nc3 0-0 11.Bf4 White stops the ...e7-e5 push. 11...Ne6 12.Be3 Nf6 13.h3 Qc7 14.Qd2 Rd8 15.Rad1 b6 16.Rfe1 Bb7 17.Qc1 Nh5 18.Bf1²



Position after: 18.Bf1²

Anand, V (2784) – Nakamura, H (2787) Zurich 2016 (blitz). White had at least a comfortable edge.

C) 5...g6 6.0-0 [6.c4 Nc7 7.exd6 Qxd6 could transpose.] 6...Bg7 7.c4 Nc7 8.exd6 Qxd6 9.Nc3 0-0

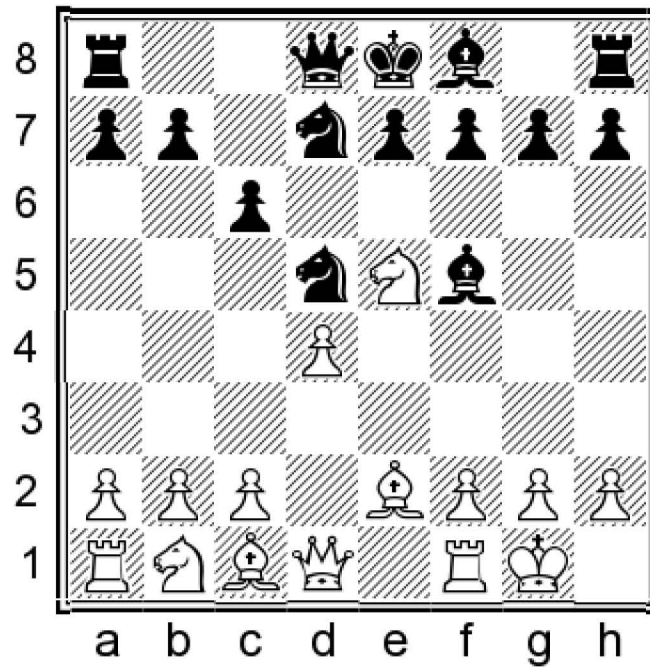


Position after: 9...0-0

C1) 10.Ne4 Qd8 11.Qb3 a5 [Black can also try to solve the issue of his b7-pawn with the sacrifice 11...b5!?.] 12.Be3² 1-0 (31) Rada, H (2322) – Zanolin, H (2358) ICCF email 2005.

C2) 10.Be3 Nba6 11.Qd2² White enjoyed a more pleasant position at this point in Detela, W (2431) – Zanolin, H (2358) ICCF email 2005, although Black prevailed in the end.

6.0-0 dxe5 7.Nxe5 Nd7



Position after: 7...Nd7

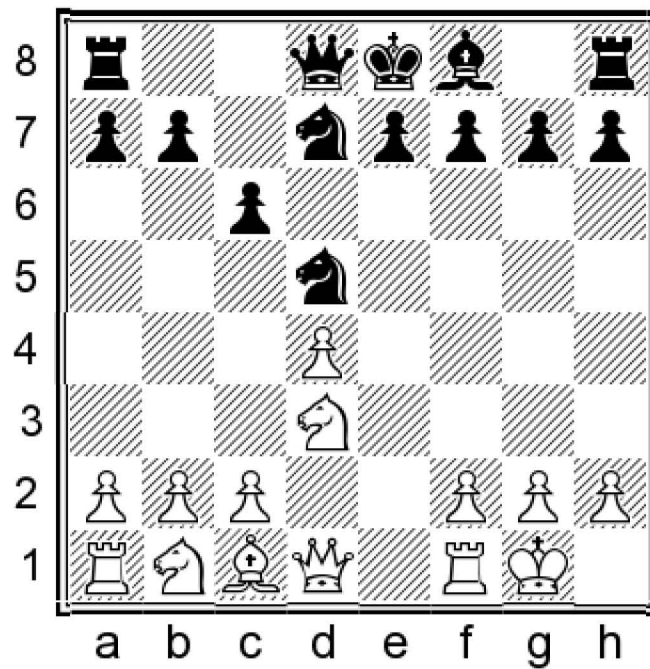
Zhao Xue has reached this position numerous times, and here you have some examples drawn from her games: 8.Bd3

A) 8.Nf3 e6 9.a3 b5 10.b3 Bd6 Muzychuk, A (2582) – Zhao, X (2477) Huaian 2017 (blitz) was already about equal.

B) 8.Nc4 e6 9.Nbd2 At this point, rather than 9...b5 10.Ne3, as in Muzychuk, M (2544) – Zhao, X (2477) Huaian 2017 (blitz) 0-1 (69), Black could have gone for the more circumspect 9...Be7=.

8...Bxd3 9.Nxd3

Or 9.Qxd3!? when 9...e6, preceded or not by the swap 9...Nxe5 10.dxe5, looks a tad better for White but no more than that.



Position after: 9.Nxd3

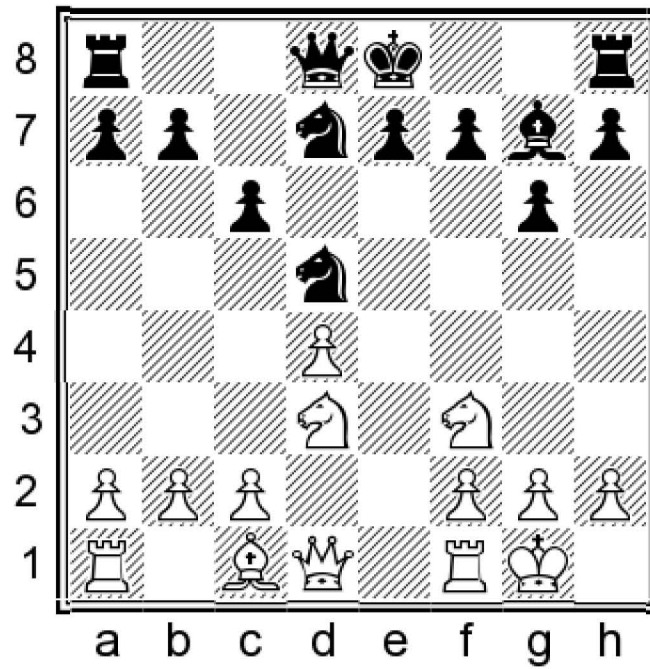
9...g6

9...e6 10.c4 Ne7 11.Nc3 Nf6² was another way to handle the position.

10.Nd2

Or 10.c4 Nc7².

10...Bg7 11.Nf3



Position after: 11.Nf3

11...0-0

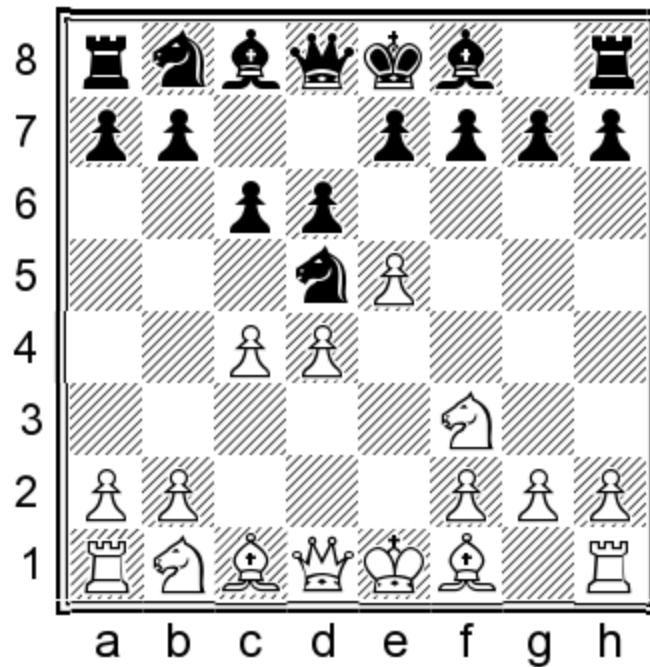
Harika, D (2492) – Zhao Xue (2485) Hengshui 2019 (rapid).

White retains a spatial advantage but Black is very solid.

Alternatively, 11...b5!? is also interesting.

d) 4...c6 5.c4

1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.Nf3 c6 5.c4



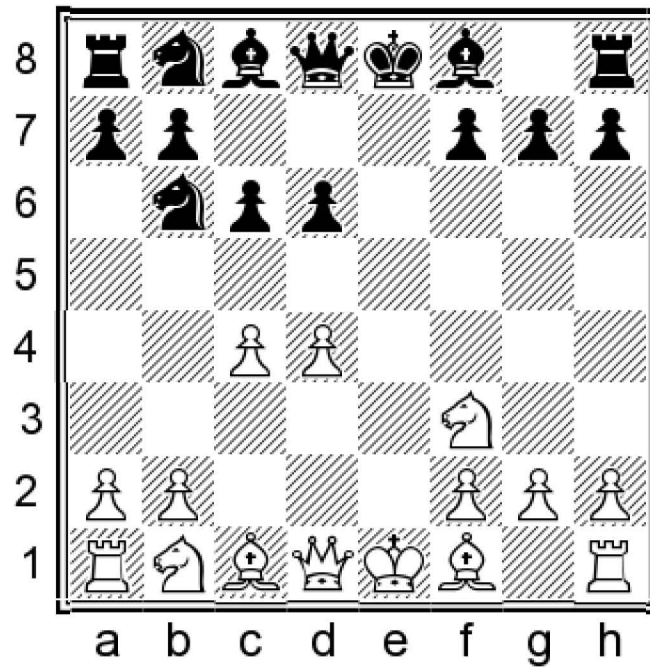
Position after: 5.c4

5...Nc7

This retreat, by far more popular than 5...Nb6, also looks more logical since the knight could prove to be nicely placed on e6 later on.

5...Nb6

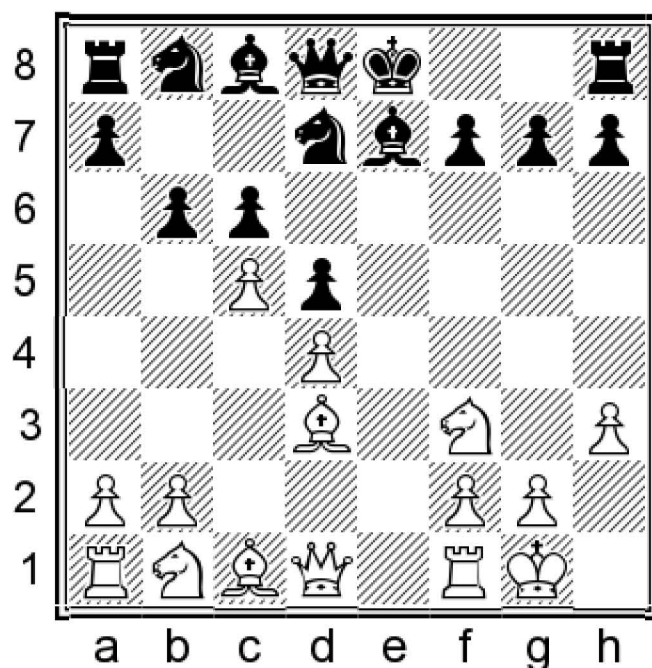
A) The swap 6.exd6 is probably easier to handle for Black. 6...exd6



Position after: 6...exd6

A1) 7.Nc3 Bg4 8.h3 Bh5 9.Be2 Be7 10.Qb3 0-0 11.0-0 a5 12.a4 Na6
13.Be3 Nb4 14.Na2 Nxa2 15.Qxa2= 0-1 (50) Lagno, K (2547) – Zhao, X
(2477) Huaian 2017.

A2) 7.Bd3 Be7 8.h3 d5 9.c5 N6d7 10.0-0 b6



Position after: 10...b6

11.cxb6 [11.Re1 intending 11...bxc5?! 12.Bg5 f6 13.Nh4! could well lead to a massacre, therefore Black should likely opt for the safer 11...0-0.]

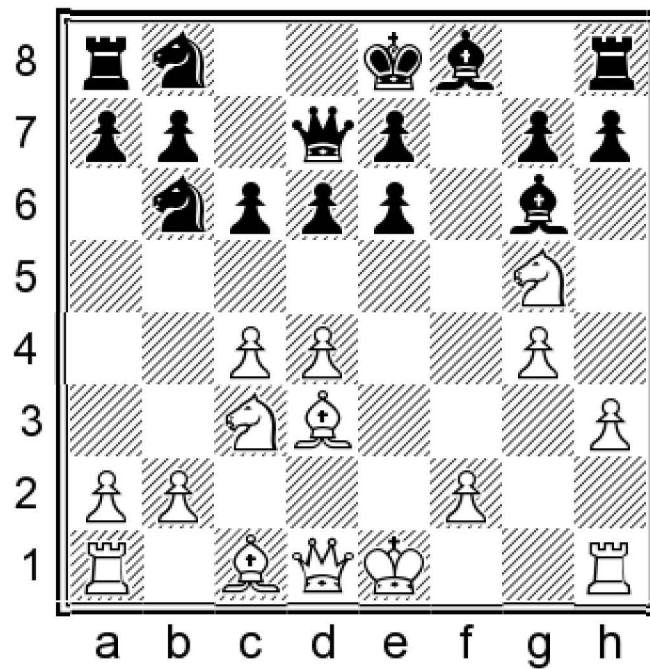
11...axb6 12.Re1 0-0 [12...Nf8!] 13.Nc3 Nf6 [13...Re8!?!; 13...Ba6!?!]

14.Ne5² Muzychuk, M (2563) – Zhao Xue (2485) Hengshui (blitz) 2019.

B) 6.Nc3

B1) In case of 6...Bf5 7.Nh4!? followed by f2-f4 seems more ambitious than 7.Bf4 dxe5 8.Nxe5 N8d7² Bodnaruk, A (2431) – Zhao Xue (2485) Hengshui (blitz) 2019.

B2) 6...Bg4 7.h3 Bh5 8.g4 Bg6 9.e6 fxe6 10.Ng5 Qd7 11.Bd3

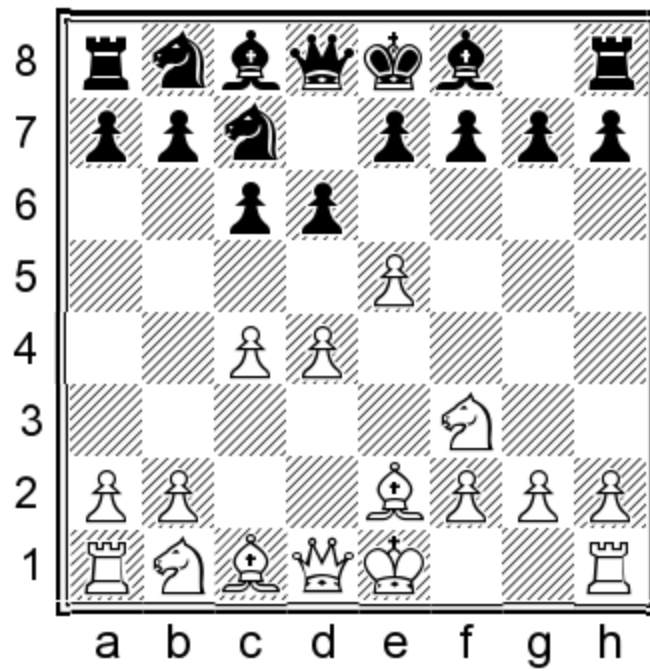


Position after: 11.Bd3

White gained tremendous play in return for a mere pawn in Gunina, V – Zhao Xue, Hengshui (blitz) 2019, even if she later lost her way in the complications.

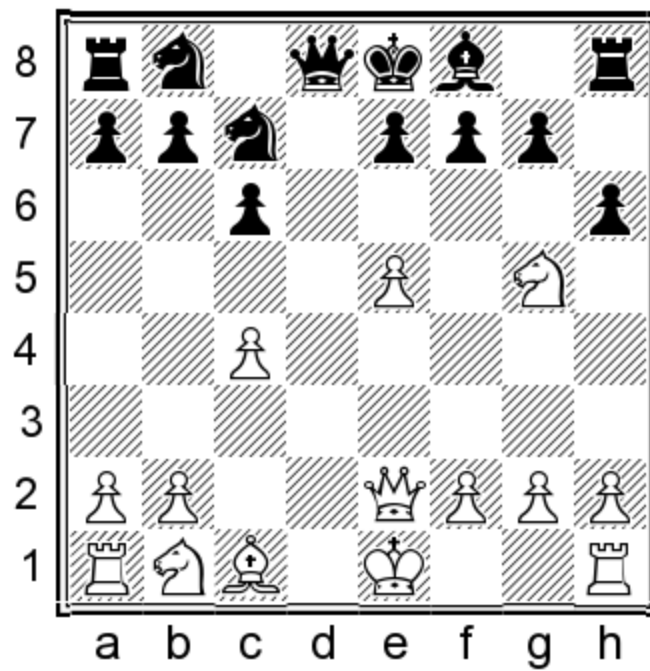
6.Nc3

6.Be2



Position after: 6.Be2

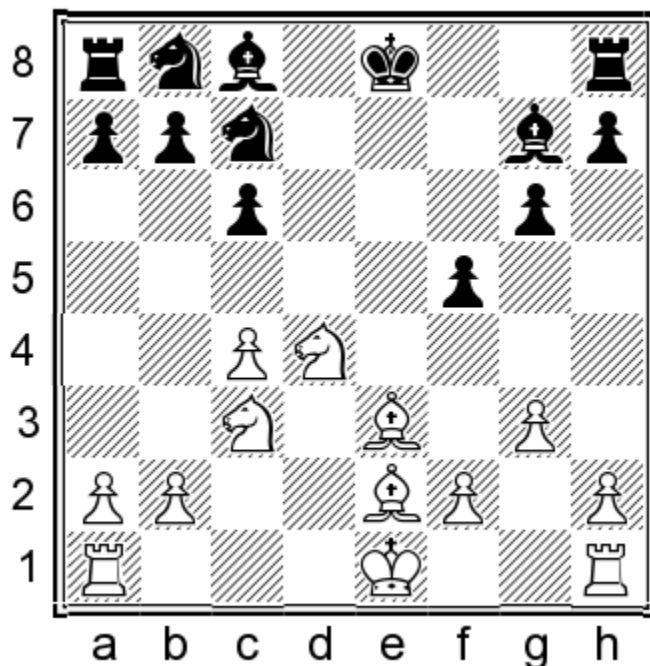
A) 6...Bg4 7.Ng5 [7.Nc3 could be a better try] 7...Bxe2 8.Qxe2 dxe5
9.dxe5 h6



Position after: 9...h6

10.Nf3 [10.Ne4!?] 10...Ne6 11.0-0 Nd7 12.Nc3 g5 13.Re1 Bg7 14.h3
Qc7,, Parma, B (2540) – Suba, M (2430) Buenos Aires 1978.

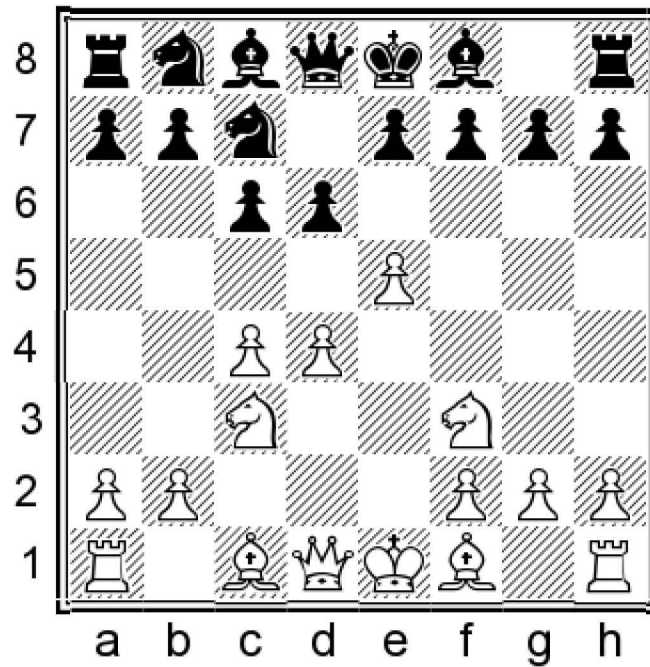
B) 6...dxe5 7.Nxe5 g6 8.Nc3 Bg7 9.Nf3 [9.f4!?] 9...e5 10.Bg5 f6 11.Be3
exd4 12.Qxd4 Qxd4 13.Nxd4 f5 14.g3²



Position after: 14.g3²

Popov, E (2352) – Kratochvil, J (2261) ICCF email 2016. White has more space but of course any outcome remains possible.

C) 6...Nd7 7.0-0 [maybe 7.exd6 exd6 8.Nc3² is stronger] 7...dxe5 8.dxe5
g6 9.b3 Bg7 10.Bb2 Ne6 11.Qd2 0-0= Krabbe, W (2377) – Koch, H
(2357) ICCF email 2002.



Position after: 6.Nc3

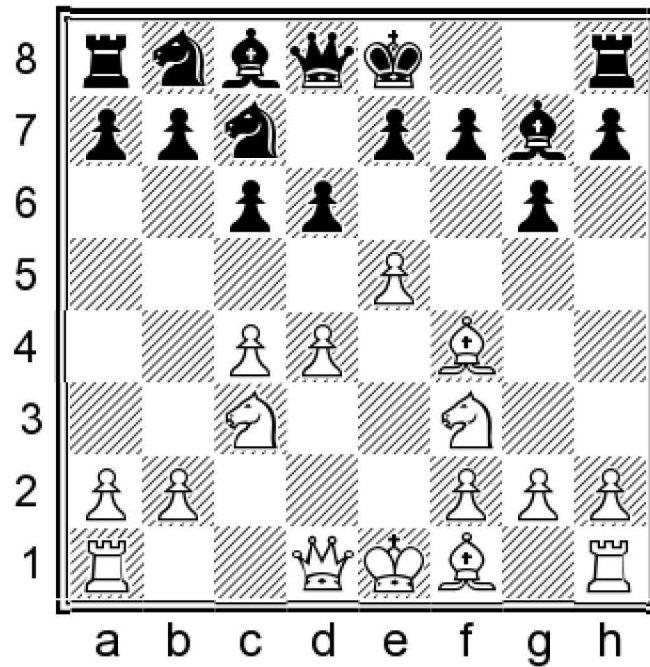
6...g6

6...dxe5 7.Nxe5 Nd7 8.Be3 g6 9.Nxd7 [9.f4!?] 9...Bxd7 10.Qd2 Bg7
11.Bh6 Bxh6 12.Qxh6 Bf5 13.0-0-0 Qd6 White was a bit better here in the
recent duel Sutovsky, E (2628) – Zilberman, Y (2334) Israel 2019.

7.exd6!

Trading pawns seems the easiest way for White to obtain a pleasant game.

7.Bf4 Bg7



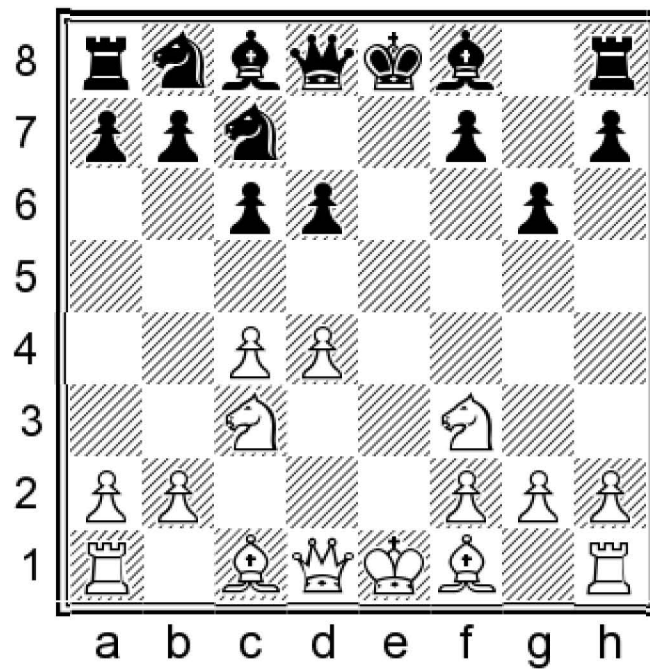
Position after: 7...Bg7

A) 8.Qd2 Neiksans, A (2557) – Kovalenko, I (2645) chess.com 2020 wasn't that convincing after 8...Bg4.

B) Instead White could have swapped 8.exd6 exd6 and simply continued 9.Be2, or else gone for complications with 9.Qe2+ Be6 10.Ne4 0-0 11.Nxd6, though with his king still stuck in the center the situation remains murky after say 11...b5∞.

7...Qxd6

The other recapture, 7...exd6?!, is even worse.



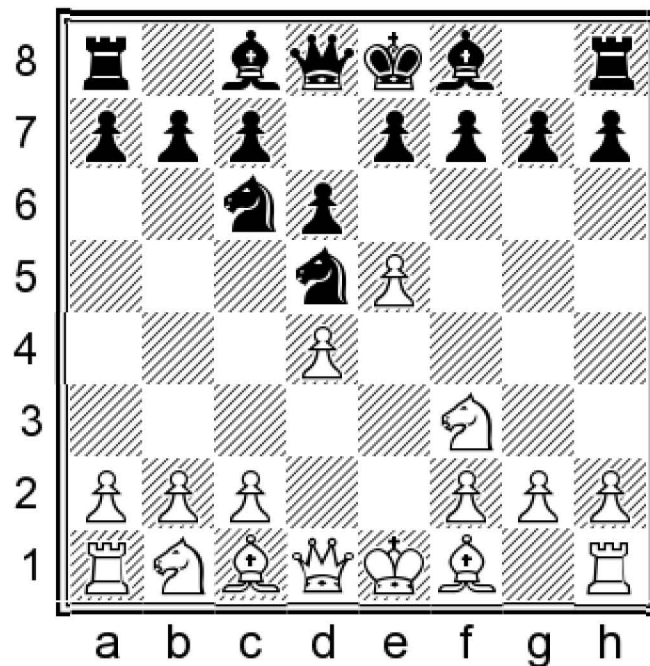
Position after: 7...exd6?!

Then 8.d5, with the idea 9.Qd4, and 8.Bg5 Be7 9.Bh6 Bf8 10.Qd2² are good, but the strongest is probably 8.Qe2+ intending 8...Be7 9.Bh6 or 8...Qe7 9.Ne4!.

8.Be3²

e) 4...Nc6 5.--

1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.Nf3 Nc6



Position after: 4...Nc6

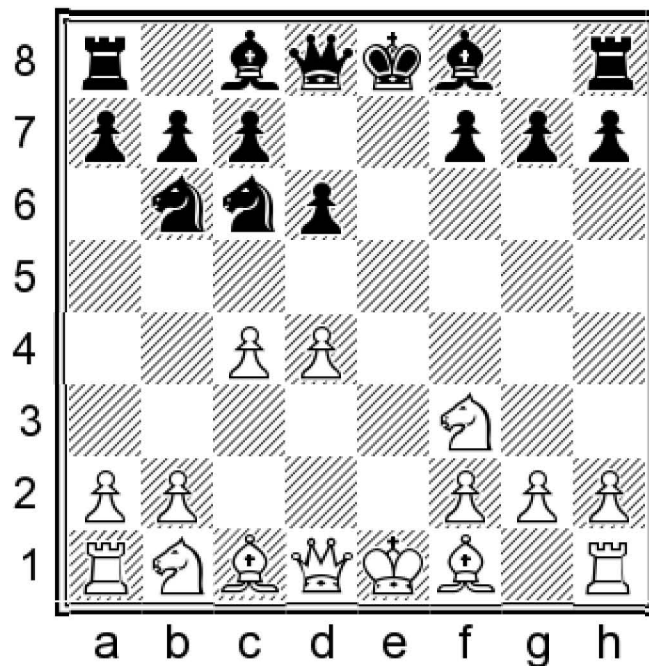
With this provocative move Black increases the pressure on the enemy e-pawn and invites it to move forward, which constitutes in my opinion the critical test. Among the 4...Nc6 devotees, Polish correspondence GMs Aleksander and Jan Marcinkiewicz have been quite prolific.

5.Bb5!?

This may lead to a complicated strategic battle if the exchange Bxc6+ ensues. Let's investigate other moves as well.

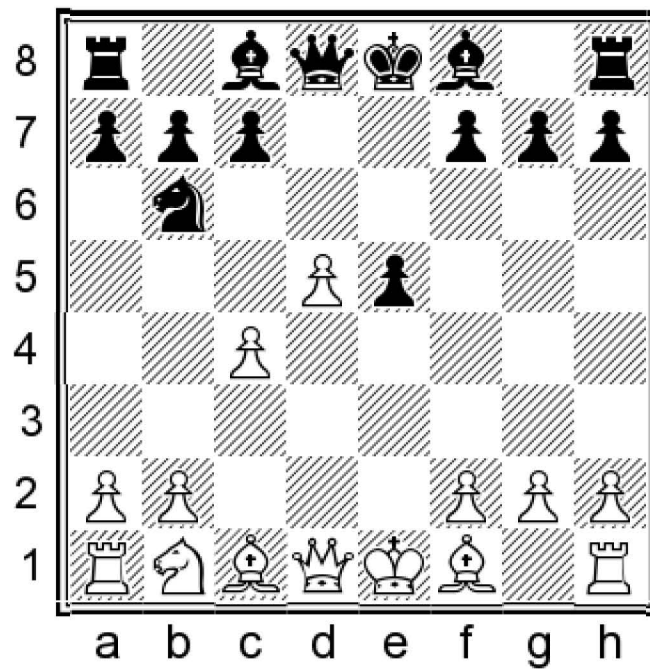
A) 5.exd6 The lazy option, avoiding any theoretical debate while keeping reasonable chances of an opening advantage.

A1) 5...exd6 6.c4 Nb6



Position after: 6...Nb6

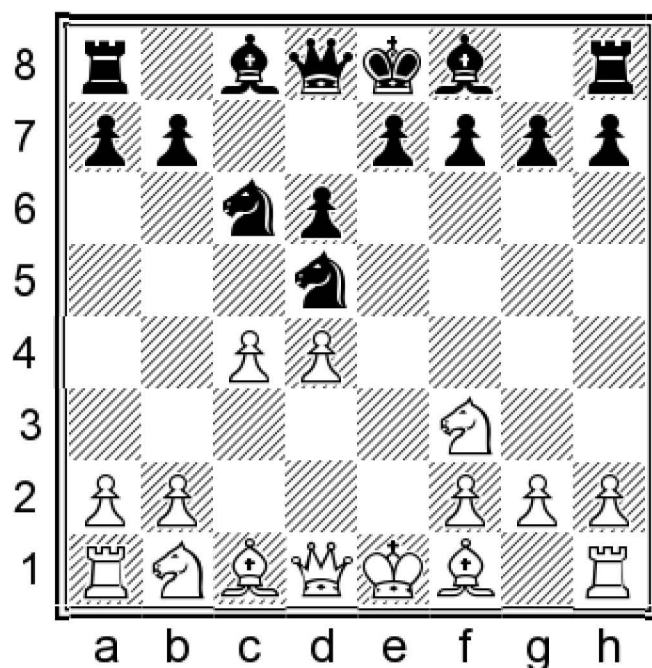
This position could arise via the move order ^(to the line) 1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.c4 Nb6 5.exd6 exd6 6.Nf3 Nc6 (see the relevant section for more details), where 6.Nf3 is much rarer than 6.Nc3 and in return 6...Nc6 less frequent than 6...Be7 or 6...Bg4. Both sides have thus committed themselves and lost some flexibility; notably the Nc3/Bd3/ Nge2 setup is no longer available. All in all White may remain a tad for choice, but this line is definitely not frightening for Black. At this crossroads, besides the standard 7.Be2 and 7.h3, another option probably deserves a special mention, namely 7.d5 Ne5 8.Nxe5 dxe5∞.



Position after: 8...dxe5

Pulkis, G (2385) – Lippstreu, G (2420) ICCF corr 2002, 0-1 (37). The change in the structure will lead to original play for this line and thus force both sides to adapt.

A2) After the other recapture, 5...cxd6?!, White must be a least a bit better if he continues chasing the rival knights away by c2-c4 followed by d4-d5. 6.c4

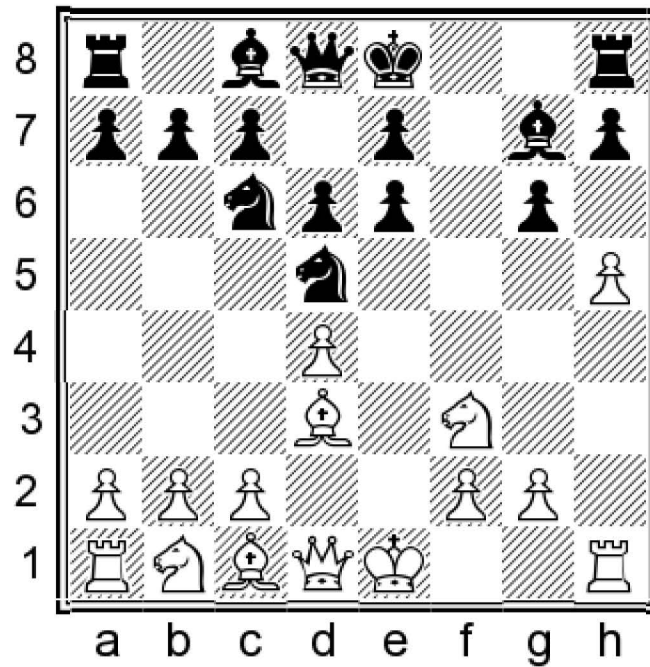


Position after: 6.c4

A1.1) 6...Nb6 7.d5 Ne5 [On 7...Nb8 the disturbing 8.Bg5 could be tried, in order to pin the e-pawn] 8.Nxe5 dxe5 9.a4! White prevents 9...e6?! in view of 10.a5 Nd7 11.dxe6. Stopping the a-pawn's march with 9...a5? runs into 10.c5!+– followed by 11.Bb5, which leaves 9...g6 as the only sensible option remaining.

A1.2) 6...Nf6 7.Nc3² [7.d5!? Ne5 White can probably count on a small plus with 8.Be2 now, whereas the swap 8.Nxe5 dxe5 looks less suitable to me since 9...e6 comes next.] Since 7...d5?! is a Panov Attack of the Caro-Kann, 1.e4 1...c6 2.d4 d5 3.exd5 cxd5 4.c4 Nf6 5.Nc3 Nc6, a tempo down for Black, another seventh move must be tried.

B) Pushing 5.e6!? at once is on principle less accurate than after 5.c4 Nb6, because the king's knight could come back to f6 later on in order to bolster the kingside. 5...fxe6 6.Bd3 g6 7.h4 Bg7 8.h5

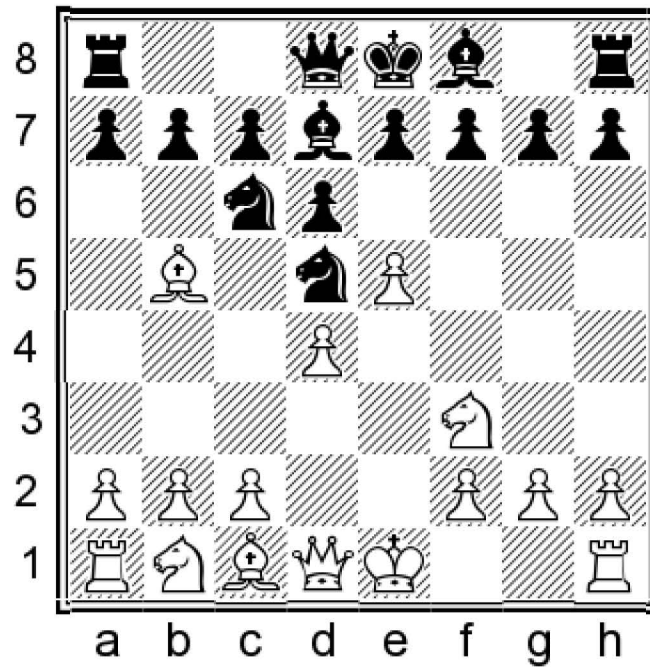


Position after: 8.h5

8...Ndb4 [Black could also have dealt with the threat of 9.hxg6 by running away or taking the intruder: 8...Kd7!?!; 8...gxh5!?!] 9.hxg6 Nxd3+ 10.Qxd3 e5?? [10...hxg6! 11.Rxh8+ Bxh8∞ Black will play 12...Kd7 whether White takes on g6 or not] 11.Rxh7 and White was already winning in Kollars, D (2586) – Chighladze, I (2335) chess.com 2020.

5...a6

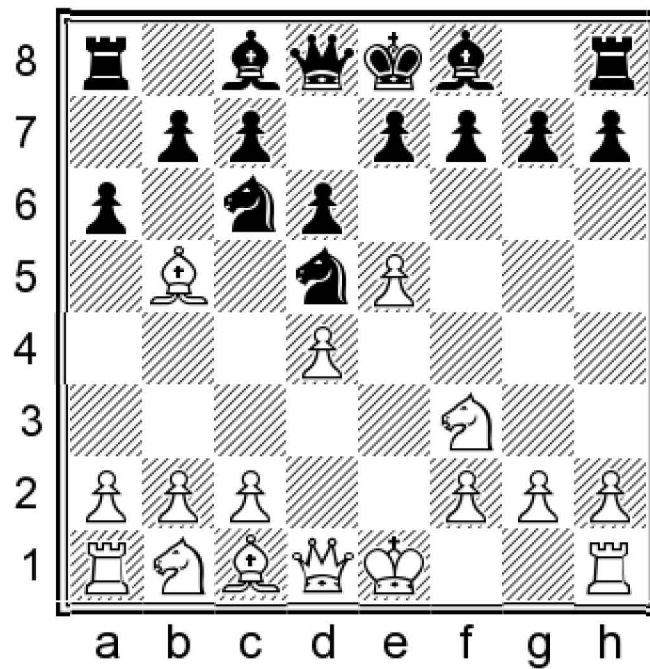
5...Bd7



Position after: 5...Bd7

A) 6.Bc4 In Grischuk, A (2777) – Bortnyk, M (2473) chess.com 2020, 1-0 (54), the Russian super-GM used this move to parry the threat of 6...Nxe5, and he kept an opening pull. 6...e6 7.0-0 Nb6 8.Bb3 dxe5 9.dxe5 Na5 10.Qe2 c5 11.c4 Be7 12.Nc3 Bc6 13.Bf4² White had more space and the easy plan of Rad1 followed by Ne4.

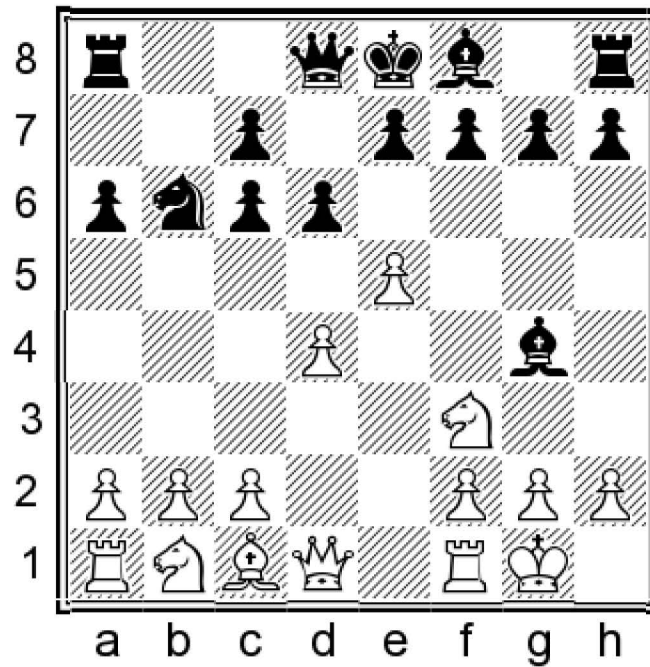
B) Instead of removing his bishop White could also have tried 6.c4 Nb6 and now both 7.a4 and 7.Nc3 need to be checked.



Position after: 5...a6

6.Bxc6+

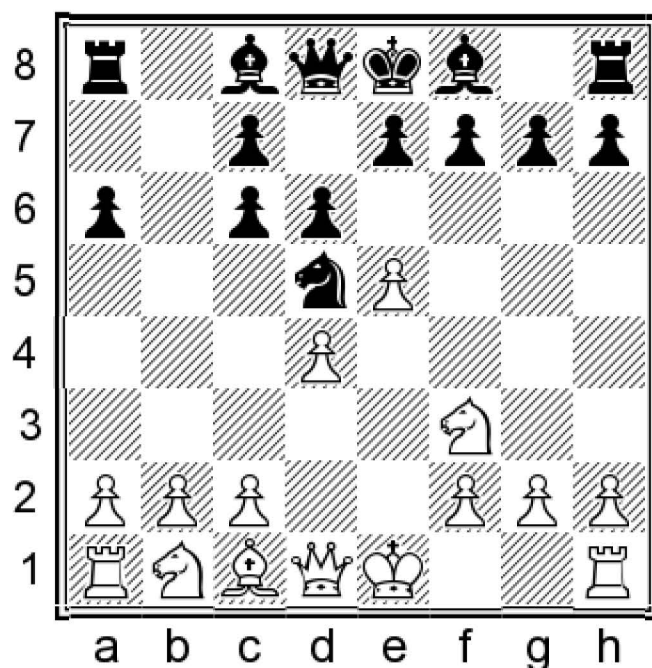
In the event of 6.Ba4 Black can force his opponent's hand with 6...Nb6, when it is not yet clear who will benefit from the knight's retreat to b6. Indeed, it exerts less central influence there, but White won't gain time pushing it back with an later c2-c4. 7.Bxc6+ bxc6 8.0-0 Bg4



Position after: 8...Bg4

9.Qe2 [The thematic pawn sacrifice 9.h3 Bh5 10.e6 can be seen under 6.Bxc6+.] 9...Qd7 10.h3 Bh5 11.Nc3 e6∞ It seems to me that Black could be happy with the outcome of the opening in Schuster, P (2541) – Marcinkiewicz, A (2446) ICCF email 2003.

6...bxc6



Position after: 6...bxc6

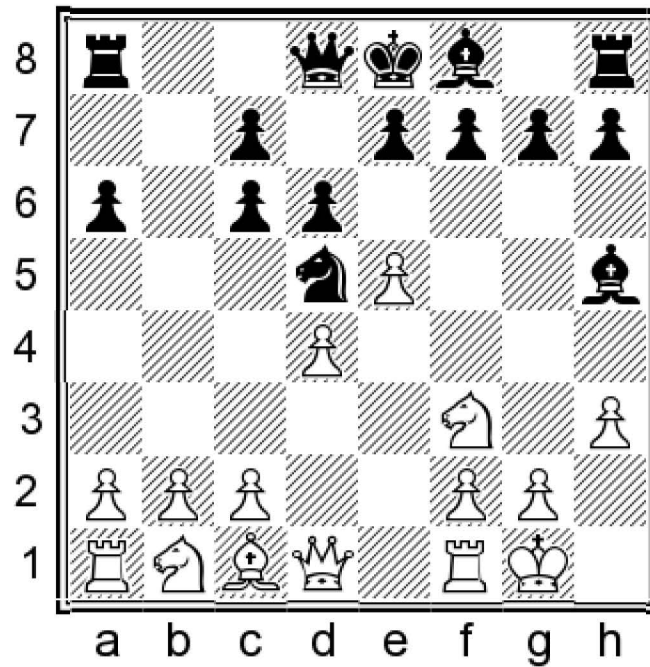
7.0-0

Or 7.c4 Nb6 8.b3 Bf5 9.0-0 e6∞ Straka, Z (2305) – Spal, M (2440) Czech Republic 2000, ½-½ (27). Black has a strong light-squared bishop and interesting potential for counterplay. Indeed, after ...Be7 followed by ... 0-0, the break ...f7-f6 could happen, as well as ...a5-a4, or else ...c6-c5/...d7-d5 preceded or not by ...Nb6-d7.

7...Bg4 8.h3

8.c4 is another option. 8...Nb6 Now the encounter Ludwig, C (2653) – Marcinkiewicz, J (2452) ICCF email 2004 took a strange course: 9.Qd3 Qd7 10.Qb3 Bxf3 11.Qxf3 Nxc4 12.Nd2 Nb6 13.Ne4 e6∞. The computer believes White has enough compensation for the pawn here, which seems true to me.

8...Bh5



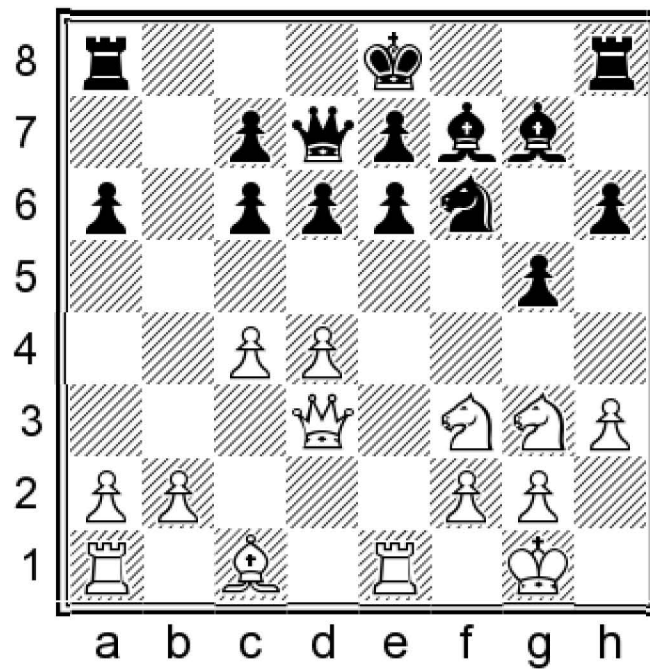
Position after: 8...Bh5

9.e6!?

More fun but also more committal than 9.b3 Jankowicz, R (2200) – Thomas, R (2465) ICCF email 1998 or 9.Re1 e6 Barnsley, A (2440) – Marcinkiewicz, J (2420) ICCF corr 1997. I would rate the position in all cases as dynamically balanced.

9...fxe6 10.Re1 Qd7 11.c4 Nf6 12.Nc3 h6 13.Qd3 g5 14.Ne2 Bg7 15.Ng3 Bf7 ∞

Lorentzen, O (2509) – Marcinkiewicz, A (2454) ICCF email 2002.

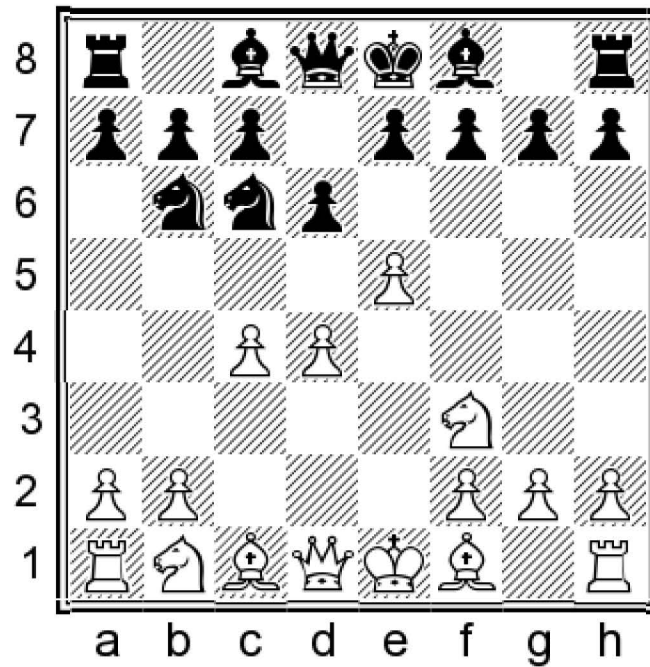


Position after: 15...Bf7

Optically it is obvious that White can claim compensation for the sacrificed pawn, but all three results are possible.

f) 4...Nc6 5.c4

1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.Nf3 Nc6 5.c4! Nb6

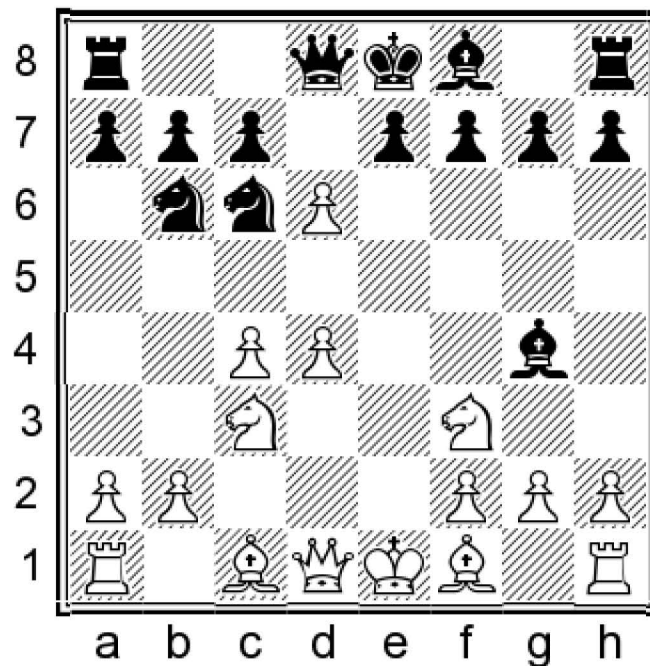


Position after: 5...Nb6

6.e6!

The only challenging attempt to show that 4...Nc6 has some drawbacks, the most evident being that now 6...Bxe6 loses a piece after the fork 7.d5.

Other moves like 6.Be2 or 6.Nc3 can't bother Black much. For instance 6.Nc3 Bg4 7.exd6



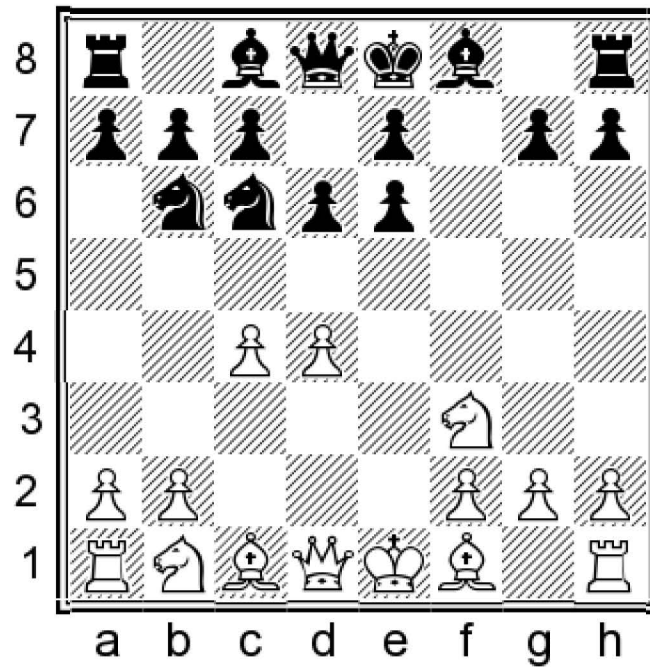
Position after: 7...exd6

A) 7...exd6 The easiest, when Black gets a rather good version of the 4.c4 Nb6 5.exd6 exd6 line.

B) Black may also venture 7...Bxf3 8.gxf3 [8.Qxf3 Nxd4 9.Qxb7 cxd6 occurred in the correspondence game Dufek, J (2400) – Spal, M (2440) Czech Republic 2000, where Black eventually held a draw] 8...exd6 9.d5 Ne7 [9...Ne5!?] 10.Qd4 c5 11.dxc6 Nxc6∞ Boukal, P (2440) – Spal, M (2450) Czech Republic 2000, ½-½ (34).

C) 7...cxd6 8.Be3 g6∞ Colmenares, A – Damia, A Italy 2017.

6...fxe6



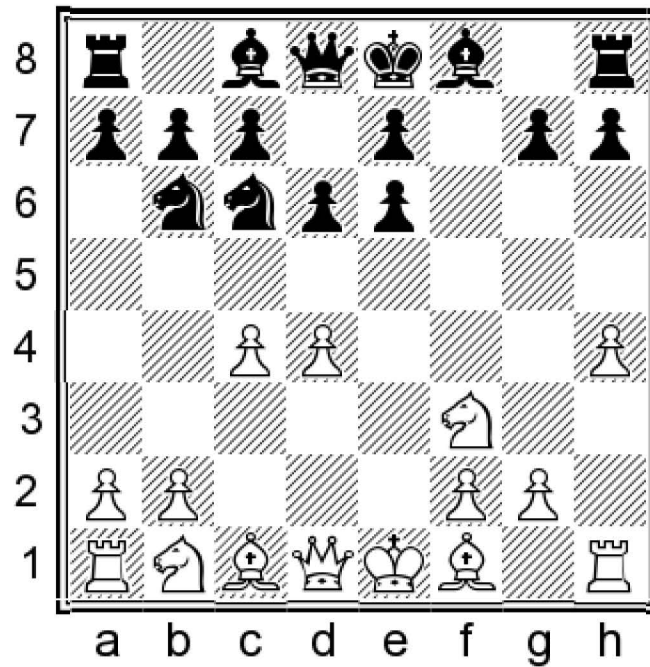
Position after: 6...fxe6

A highly interesting position. In return for his pawn White has weakened the opponent's kingside, which will provide him with neat attacking chances on that flank. The natural development of Black's light-squared bishop is hindered, meaning that Black will often have to give the material back after a subsequent ...e6-e5 d4-d5 ...Nd4 Nxd4 ...exd4 Qxd4.

7.Nc3

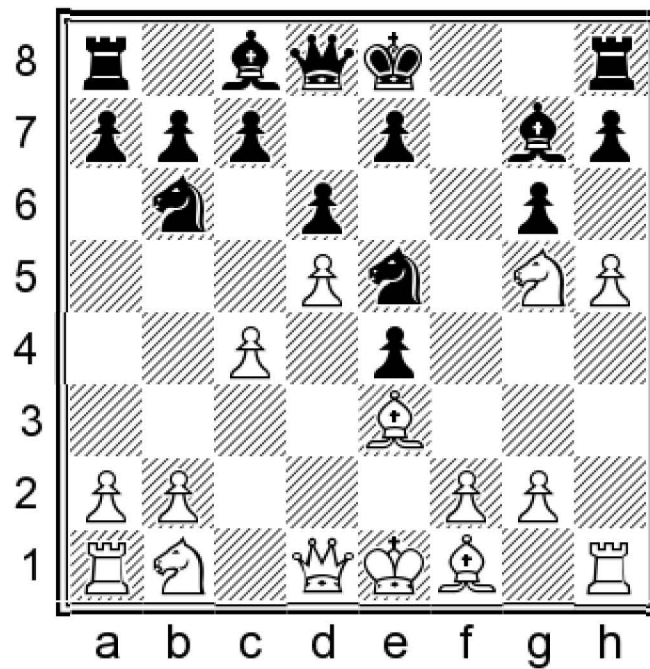
A) 7.Be3 should soon transpose to 7.h4 or 7.Nc3 if Black plays 7...g6, whereas 7...e5 8.d5 would take an independent course.

B) White can also anticipate that his opponent will resort to ...g7-g6 in the near future and go for 7.h4!?



Position after: 7.h4!?

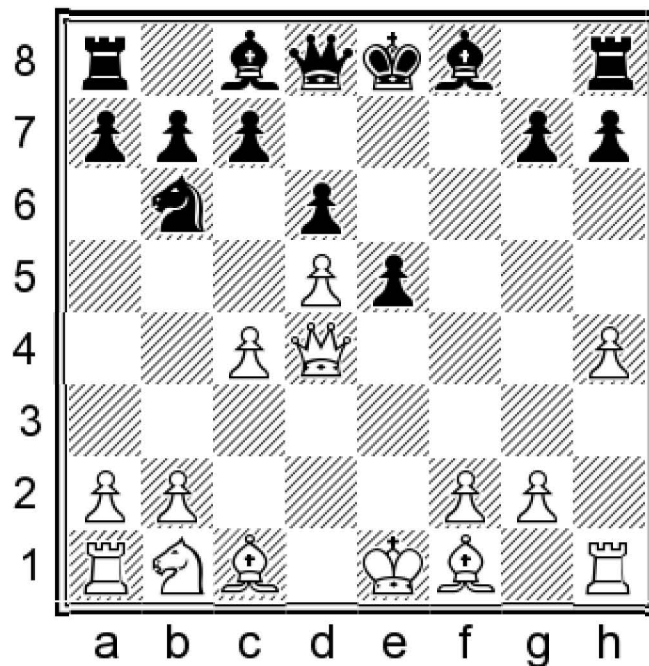
B1) 7...g6 remains fully playable anyway! 8.h5 Bg7 9.Be3! [9.hxg6?!
 hxg6 10.Rxh8+ Bxh8 11.Nc3 e5 12.d5 Nd4∞ Vishnu, P (2476) –
 Bortnyk, M (2473) chess.com 2020] 9...e5 10.d5 e4 11.Ng5 Ne5



Position after: 11...Ne5

12.hxg6 [12.Nc3²] 12...hxg6 13.Rxh8+ Bxh8 14.Nxe4 This happened in Ponomariov, R (2711) – Spraggett, K (2545) Linares 2015, 1-0 (37), where after 14...c5 15.Nbc3 White enjoyed a pleasant plus. Instead 14...Bf5 seems a bit stronger, although probably ² anyway, whereas 14...Nexc4?! invites a nice refutation: 15.Bxc4 Nxc4 16.Qa4+ Qd7 17.Qxc4 Bxb2 18.Ng5! Bxa1 19.Ne6±.

B2) 7...e5 8.d5 Nd4 9.Nxd4 exd4 10.Qxd4 e5

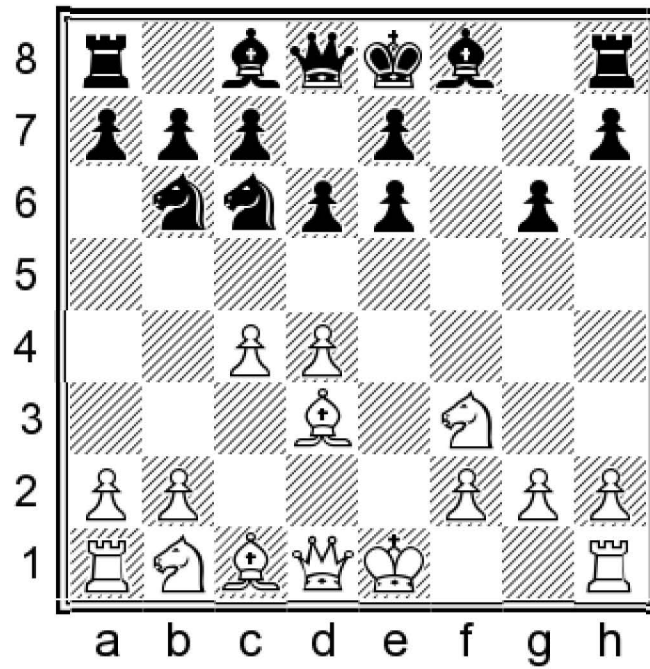


Position after: 10...e5

Black can argue here that h2-h4, instead of a useful developing move like Nb1-c3, was a shot in the dark when his g-pawn has stayed on its initial square. This is partly true, but White seems nevertheless a bit better.

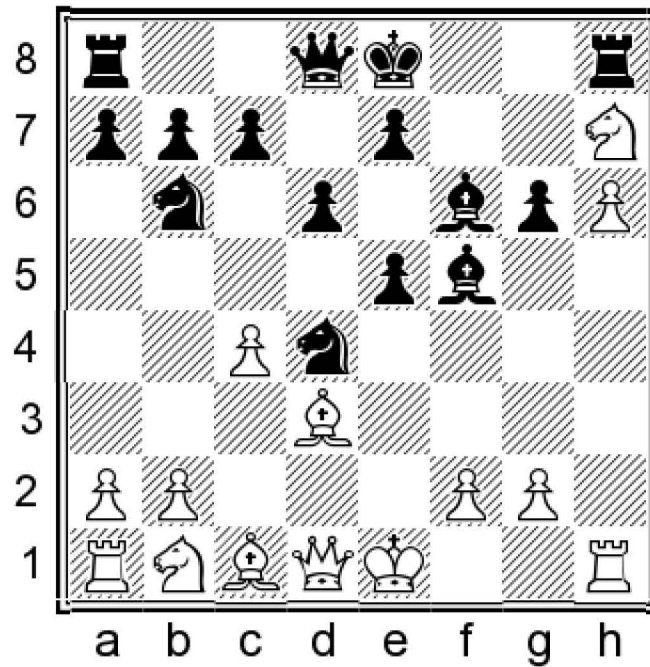
11.Qd1 [11.dxe6 Qf6 12.Qxf6 gxf6 Fedorchuk, S (2620) – Chabanon, J (2437) Le Blanc-Mesnil 2019 isn't much for White but 11.Qe4!? deserves attention] 11...Bf5 12.Bd3 Bxd3 13.Qxd3 Nd7² Nyvlt, Z (2510) – Marcinkiewicz, J (2427) ICCF email 2001, ½-½ (37).

C) 7.Bd3 Is quite logical but Black has enough defensive resources. In particular, he can allow Ng5xh7 and react with a timely ...e6-e5 followed by ...Bc8-f5 in many lines. 7...g6



Position after: 7...g6

C1) 8.h4 Bg7 9.h5 Nxd4 10.Ng5 e5 [10...Kd7 11.Nf7 Qg8 12.Nxh8 Bxh8] 11.h6 [11.hxg6 hxg6 12.Rxh8+ Bxh8 13.Bxg6+ Kd7 14.Qg4+ e6∞] 11...Bf6 12.Nxh7 Bf5

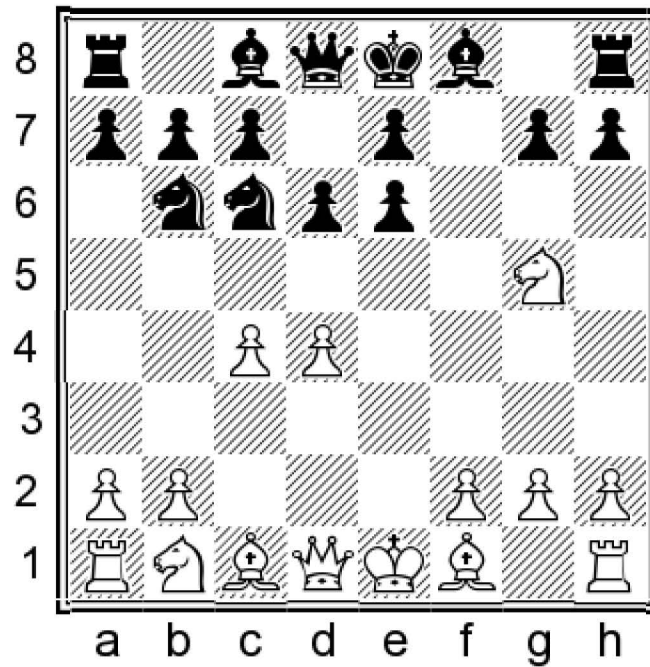


Position after: 12...Bf5

Praggnanandhaa, R (2537) – Firouzja, A (2682) Xingtai 2019, ½-½ (56).
I prefer Black here!

C2) 8.Nc3 Bg7 9.Be3 e5 10.d5 Nd4 11.Ng5∞ Sandklef, A (2304) –
Podgorny, J (2547) ICCF corr 1976, 0-1 (30).

D) The straightforward 7.Ng5 is quite popular as well, but by neglecting his development White runs a strategic risk.

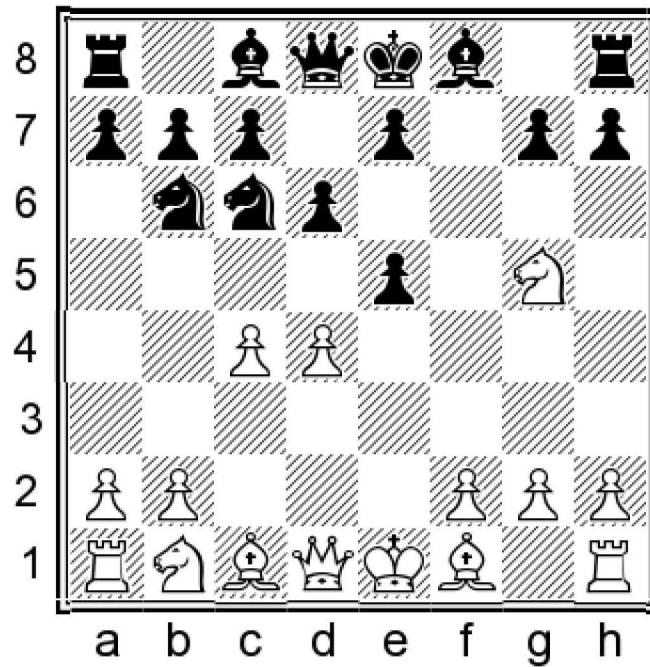


Position after: 7.Ng5

Some illustrative lines follow.

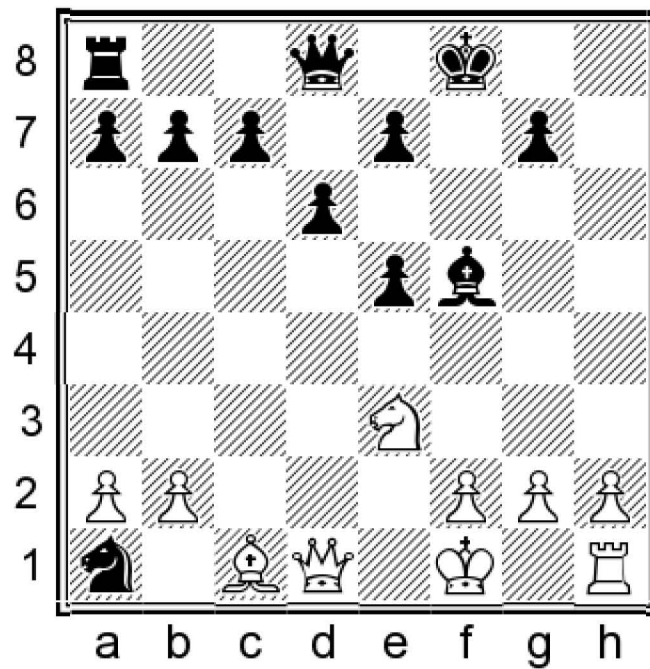
D1) 7...g6!? is a first good option. 8.d5 exd5 9.cxd5 Nb4 10.Qf3 N4xd5 11.Qf7+ [11.Nf7? fails to 11...Bg4!µ] 11...Kd7 12.Qe6+ Ke8 13.Qf7+ Kd7 ½-½ Rubio Doblas, F (2241) – Bendig, F (2453) IECG email 2003.

D2) 7...e5



Position after: 7...e5

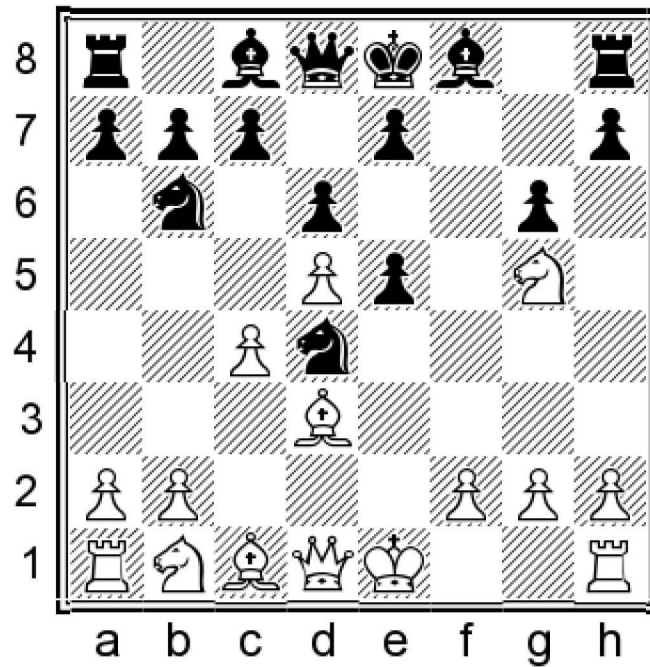
D2.1) On 8.Bd3 both captures on d4 lead to a chaotic position: 8...Nxd4 [8...exd4 9.Qh5+ g6 10.Bxg6+ hxg6 11.Qxh8 (White can also force a perpetual check by means of 11.Qxg6+ Kd7 12.Qe6+ Ke8 13.Qf7+) 11...Bf5©] 9.Bxh7 Rxh7 10.Nxh7 Bf5 11.Na3 Nxc4?! [11...Kd7! ∞ was tested in the correspondence game Lehmitz, G – Rensch DDR 1989, where it brought Black success] 12.Nxc4 Nc2+ 13.Kf1 Nxa1 14.Nxf8 Kxf8 15.Ne3².



Position after: 15.Ne3²

Black managed to solve the problem of his cornered Knight in Purnoch, J – Kopal, J Czech Republic 2001, as mentioned by Chetverik and Kalinichenko, but his opponent's play can be improved. 15...Qd7 16.Bd2?! [16.Kg1!² is the refinement mentioned above.] 16...Nc2!! 17.Nxc2 Qb5+ 18.Kg1 Qxb2 19.Ne3 Qb1 20.Bc1 Be6∞

D2.2) 8.d5 Nd4 9.Bd3 g6



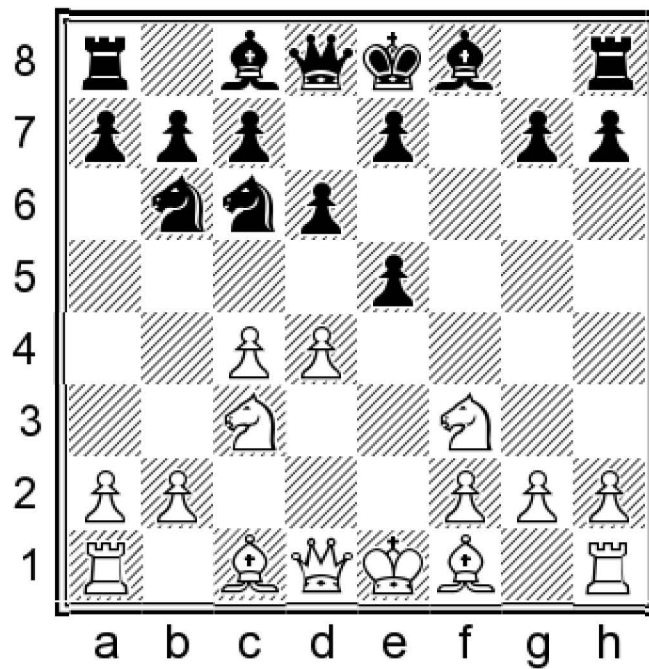
Position after: 9...g6

10.h4 [10.Nxh7 Bf5 11.Bxf5 gxf5 was fine for Black in Manduch, M (2413) – Marcinkiewicz, J (2427) ICCF email 2002, 0-1 (29).] 10...Bg7 11.h5 Bf5 12.hxg6 hxg6∞

7...g6

A more combative but also riskier option than 7...e5.

7...e5



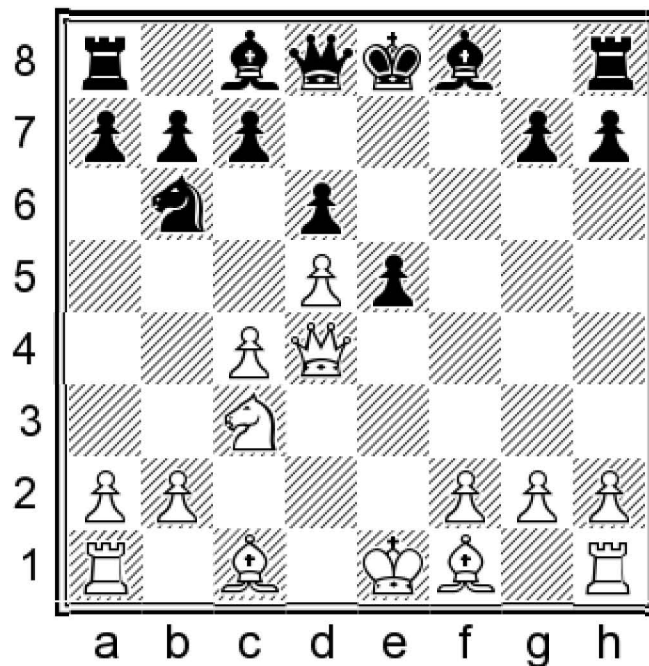
Position after: 7...e5

A) I found only two relevant occurrences of 8.dxe5!? out of more than 100 games. 8...Bg4 [8...Bf5!? was Black's reaction in the stem game where 8.dxe5 was introduced, Lendwai, R – Schroll, G Austria 1997.]

A1) 9.h3! looks a bit better for White after either 9...Bh5 or 9...Bxf3 10.Qxf3 Nxe5 11.Qxb7 c6.

A2) 9.exd6?! Qxd6 10.Be3 was about equal in Jerez Perez, A (2394) – Chabanon, J (2446) Saint-Quentin 2019, where instead of 10...Qb4 the computer prefers 10...0-0-0!.

B) 8.d5 Nd4 9.Nxd4 exd4 10.Qxd4 e5

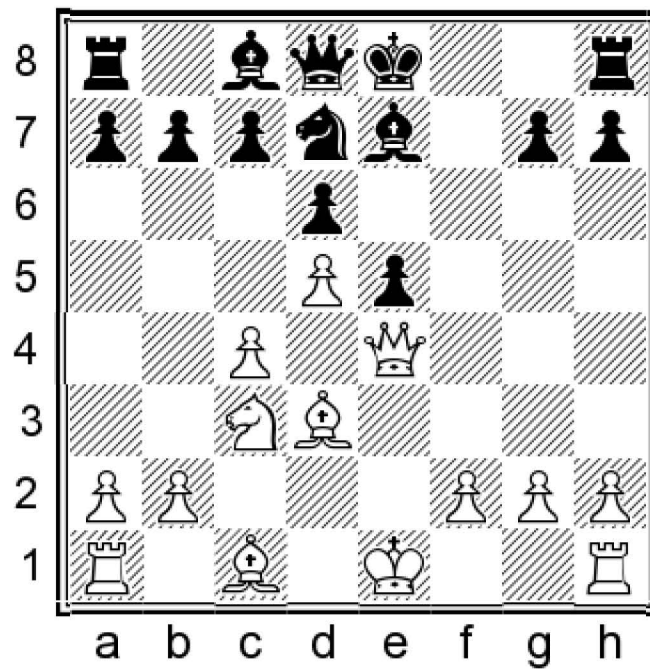


Position after: 10...e5

A common picture for this line: Black has given back his booty and asks his opponent to make up his mind between 11.dxe6 and a queen move. I'd rather fancy the second option, which leaves e4 as a nice outpost for the white horse.

B1) 11.dxe6 Bxe6 12.Be2 Qf6 13.Bh5+ Bf7 14.Bxf7+ Kxf7 Black suffered no headaches in Repp, H (2419) – Zainetdinova, S (2363) ICCF email 2003, which ended peacefully only 10 moves later.

B2) 11.Qe4!? Be7 [or 11...g6!? Krawczyk, G (2410) – Marcinkiewicz, A (2446) ICCF corr 2004, ½-½ (46)] 12.Bd3 Nd7

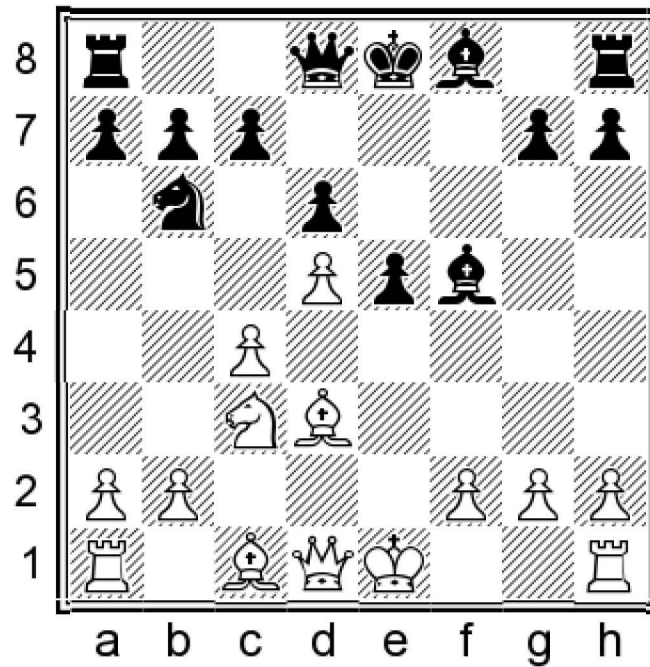


Position after: 12...Nd7

Zenker, O (2428) – Winiarski, M (2185) IECG email 2003, ½-½ (34).
The knight will bounce back to either c5 or f6, while ...Bg5 may also be on Black's agenda.

After 11.Qd1 Black should also be slightly worse but not more.

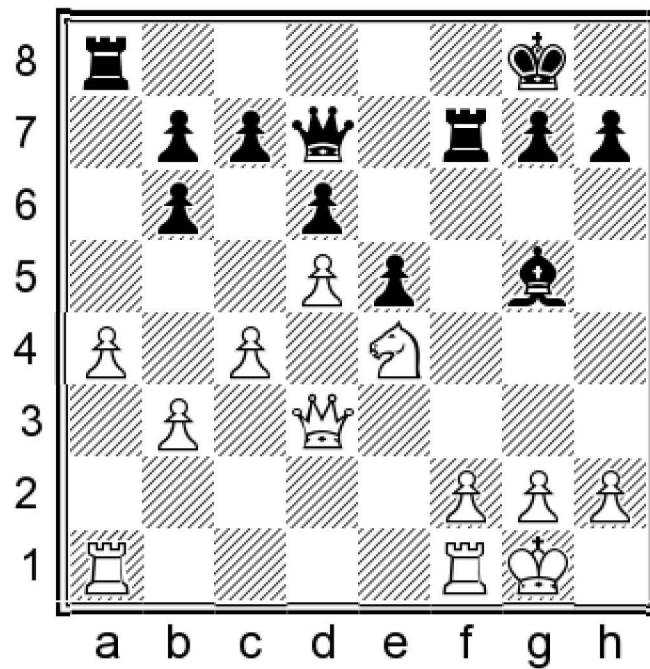
B3) 11.Qd1 Bf5 12.Bd3



Position after: 12.Bd3

12...Bxd3 [12...Qd7 13.0-0 Be7 14.a4 Bxd3 15.Qxd3 Qg4 16.Ne4²

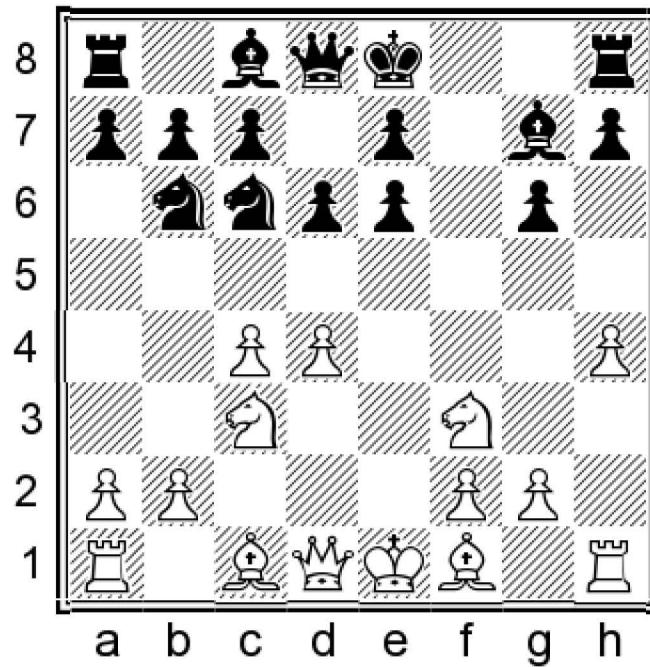
Kokarev, D – Vavulin, M Khanty-Mansiysk 2018, ½-½ (50). White could have been more ambitious and tried either 16.Nb5 Bd8 17.c5 dxc5 18.d6 or 16.a5 Nd7 17.f3.] 13.Qxd3 Be7 14.0-0 0-0 15.Be3 Bg5 16.Bxb6 axb6 17.a4 Qd7 18.b3 Rf7 19.Ne4² Stopa, J (2406) – Marcinkiewicz, J (2447) IECG email 2005, ½-½ (49).



Position after: 19.Ne4²

No doubt the powerful centralized knight is the better minor piece here, but the fact that Black held in a correspondence game means his position is quite resilient.

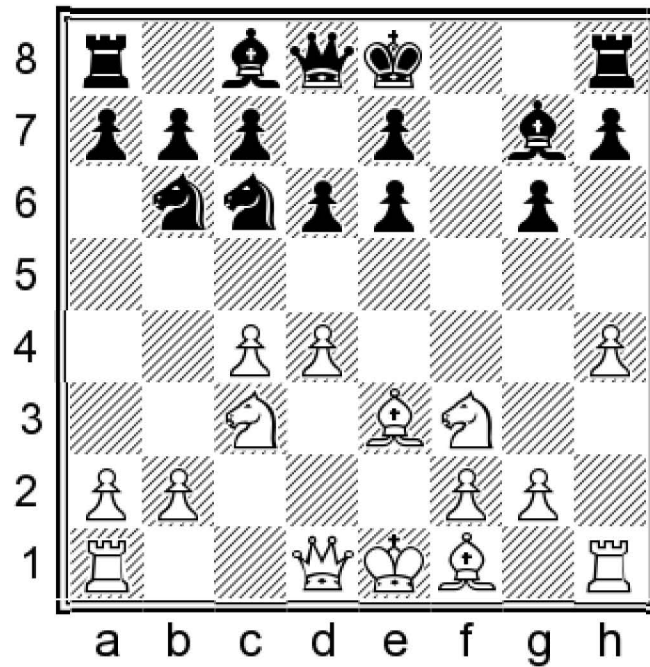
8.h4 Bg7



Position after: 8...Bg7

9.Be3!

It makes sense to anticipate the customary sequence ...e5 d5 ...Nd4, instead of rushing with 9.h5 e5 10.d5 Nd4 11.hxg6 Bg4?! [11...hxg6 was more reasonable and pretty decent for Black] 12.gxh7 Qd7. This worked well for Black in Behling, H (2427) – Marcinkiewicz, J (2404) ICCF email 1999, but the machine shows skepticism about the black concept.



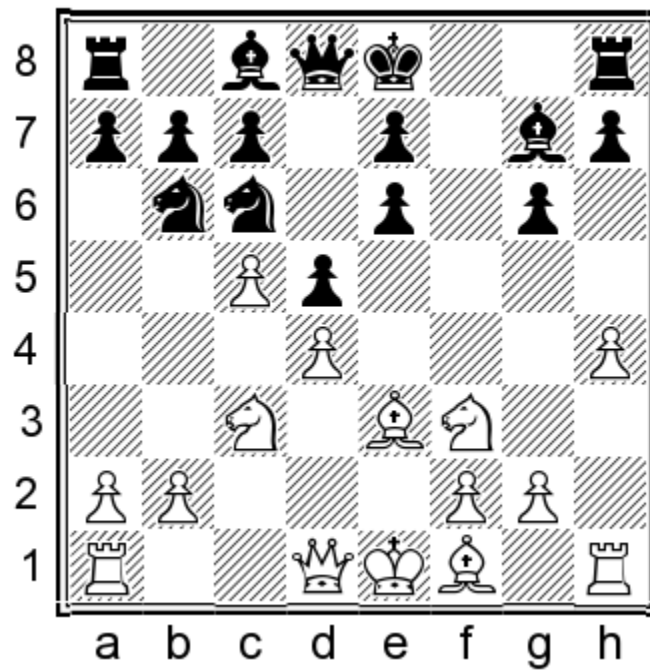
Position after: 9.Be3!

9...e5

Giving back the extra pawn at once seems the more cautious approach.

A) The greedy 9...Nd7?! 10.h5 Nf8 left Black suffocating following the simple 11.Be2 Pucelj, J (2501) – Wigbout, M (2309) ICCF email 2003.

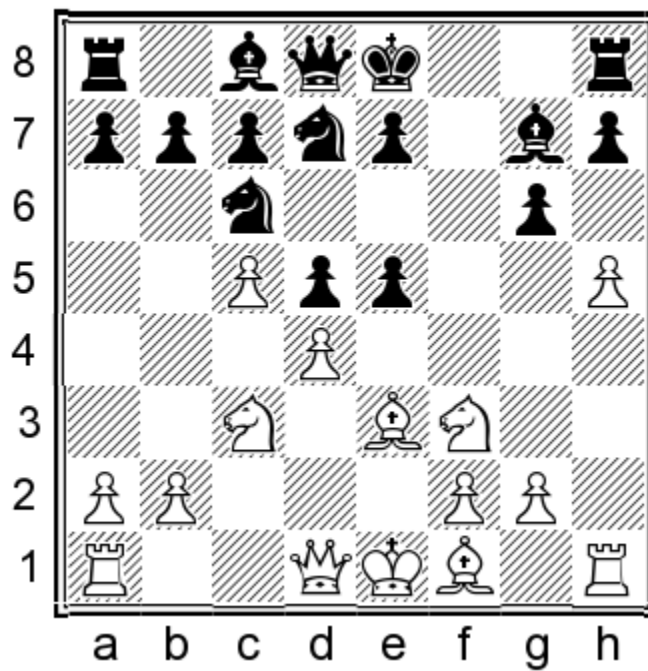
B) 9...d5?! was shown to be quite poor in Nunn, J – Vaganian, R London 1986, an uncharacteristic error by the Armenian GM. 10.c5



Position after: 10.c5

B1) 10...Nc4?! 11.Bxc4 dxc4 12.Qa4 [12.h5!] 12...Qd7 13.0-0-0±

B2) 10...Nd7 11.h5 e5 was a better try to confuse matters but White

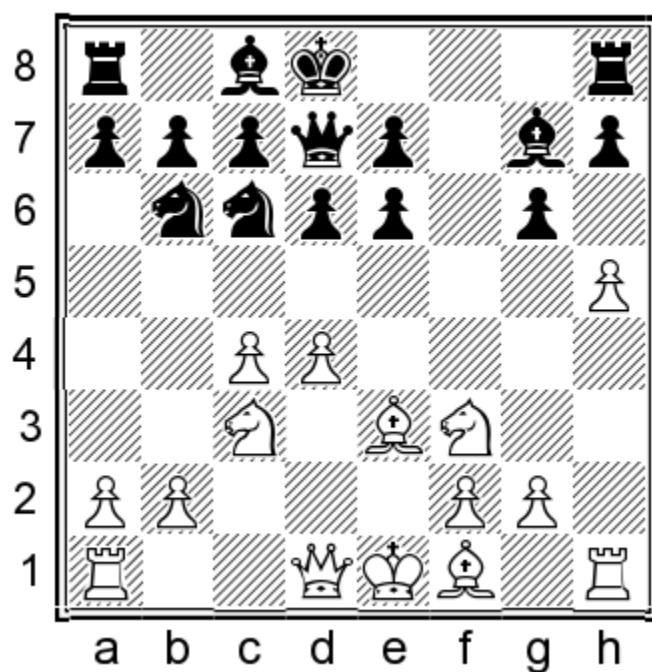


remains on top after

Position after: 11...e5

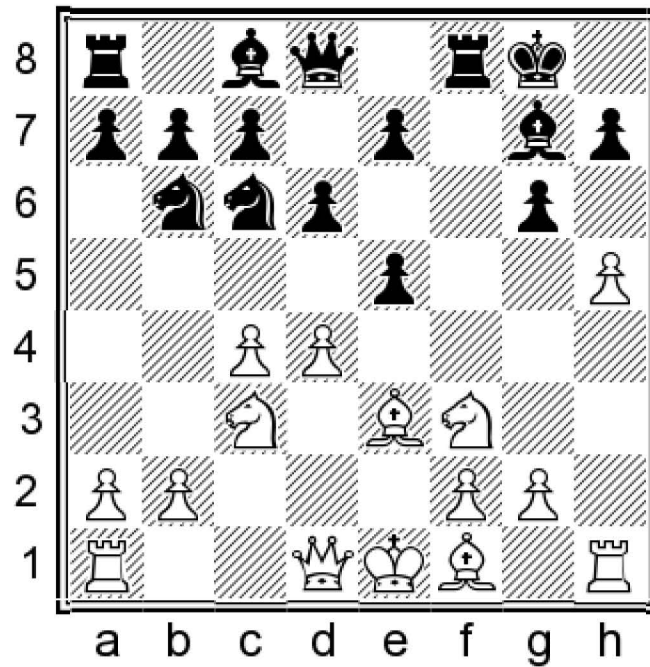
12.Nxd5 exd4 13.Nxd4 or 12.h6 Bf6 13.Nxd5 exd4 and here 14.Nxd4! is more to the point than Chetverik and Kalinichenko's suggestion of 14.Nxf6+?! exf6 15.Nxd4 Nde5 "with an approximate equality" according to them.

C) Black could grovel with the funny 9...Qd7 10.h5 Kd8 followed by ...Qe8, ...Bd7 and possibly ...Kc8-b8 but in that case it's hard to believe White isn't better!



Position after: 10...Kd8

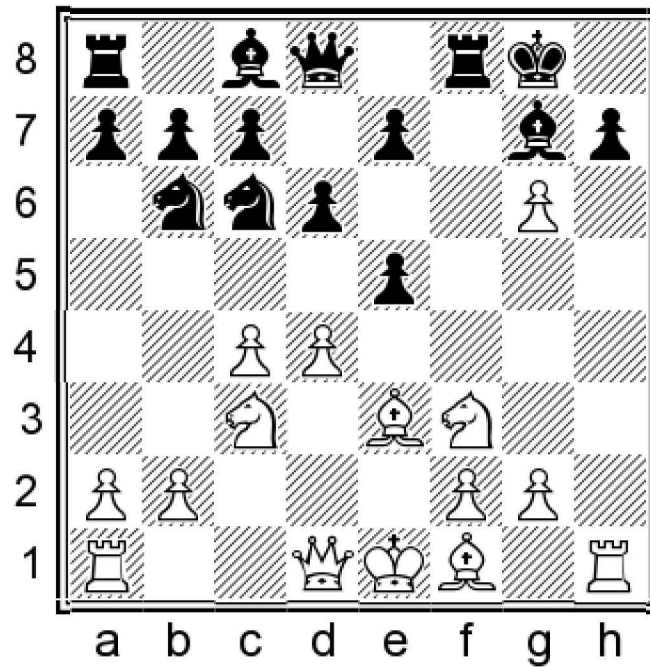
D) 9...0-0 10.h5 e5



Position after: 10...e5

D1) 11.d5 Nd4 12.Nxd4 exd4 13.Bxd4 Bxd4 14.Qxd4 e5 15.dxe6 Qf6 16.Qxf6 Rxf6 17.hxg6 hxg6 18.Ne4 Rf4 Here a draw was agreed in Lau, R (2375) – Fleck, J (2400) Germany 1984. Alternatively, keeping the queens on with 15.Qe3 seems more promising, and then both 15...Bf5 and 15...g5 16.h6 Bf5 17.Rh5 g4 need further investigation.

D2) 11.hxg6! Opening the h-file first before entering the usual simplification is a refinement over the old D1 line.

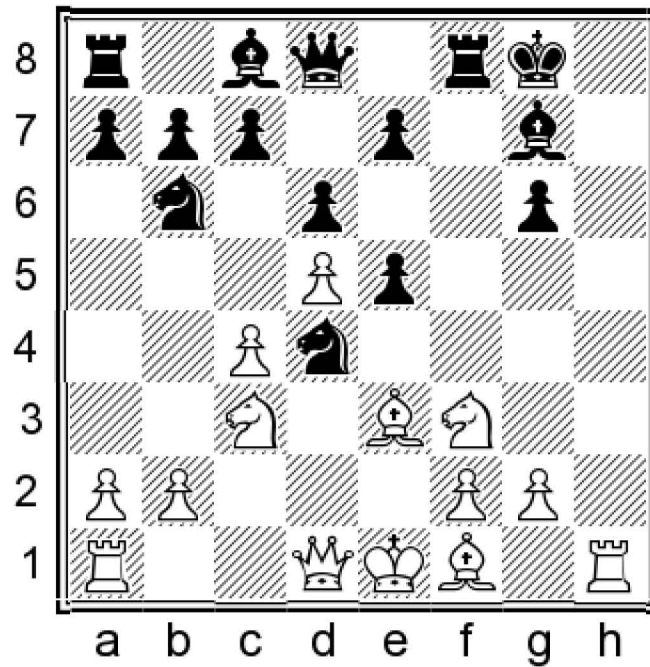


Position after: 11.hxg6!

D2.1) 11...exd4 12.gxh7+ Kh8 13.Nxd4 Ne5 14.Nf3 Nxf3+ 15.gxf3∞

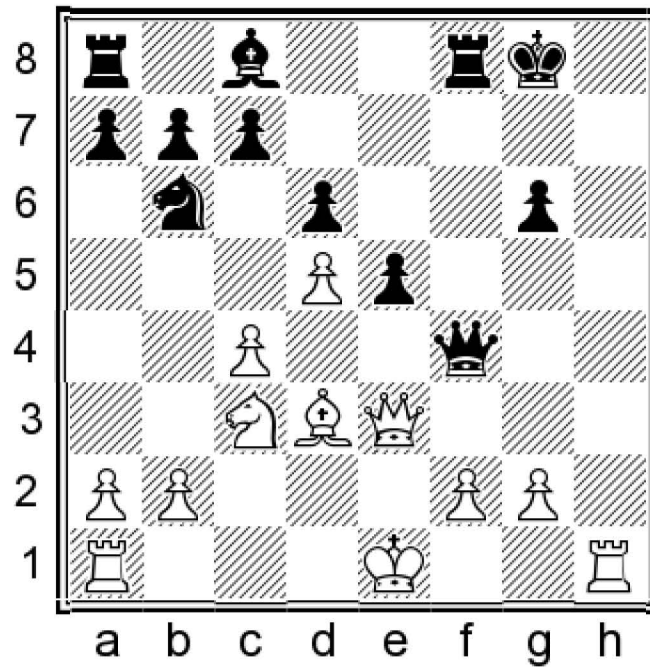
This arose in Dipietra, R – Scott, P (2277) ICCF email 2018, when in place of the game continuation, 15...Bf5, a possible small improvement could be 15...Qe8 though White's prospects should nonetheless be brighter.

D2.2) 11...hxg6 12.d5 Nd4



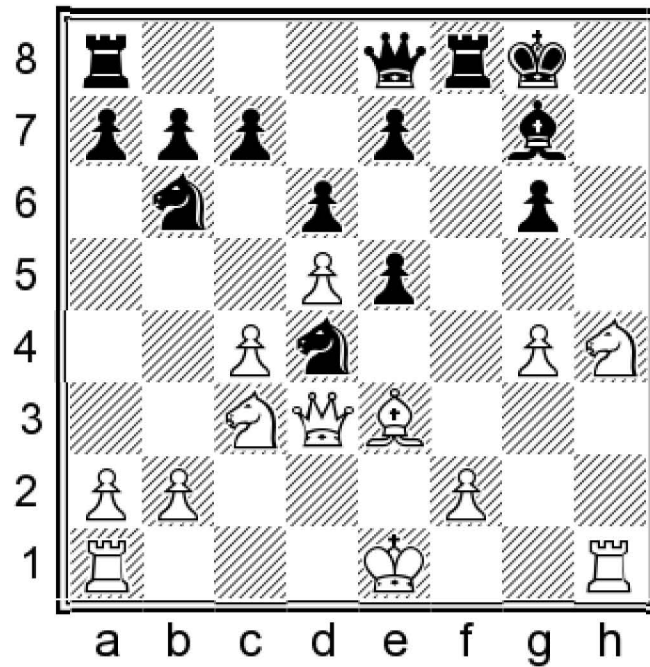
Position after: 12...Nd4

Here 13.Nxd4 is the safest, whereas the evaluation of 13.Nh4 probably depends on 15.g4! Let's check both knight moves. 13.Nh4 [13.Nxd4 exd4 14.Bxd4 Bxd4 15.Qxd4 e5 16.Qe3 Qf6 17.Bd3 Qf4



Position after: 17...Qf4

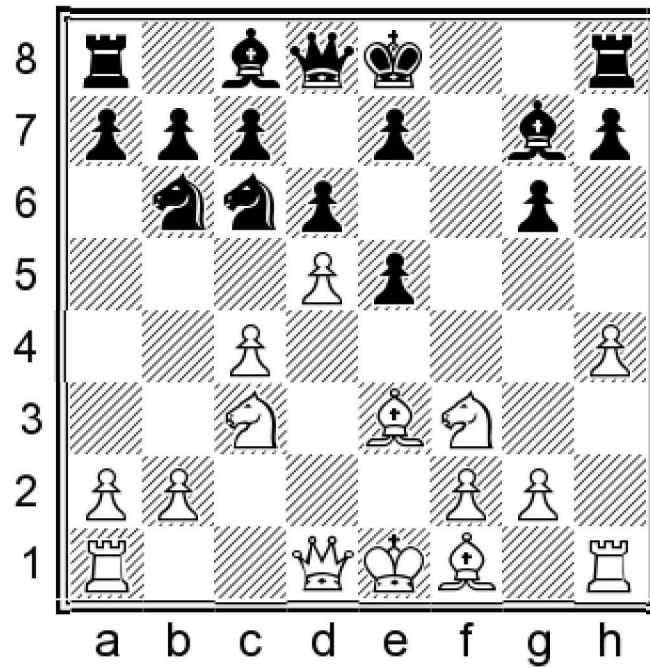
Otherwise the black king could prove too vulnerable. 18.Rh6! Qxe3+ 19.fxe3 Bf5 20.Kd2± White had gained a sizeable endgame edge in Geenen, M (2617) – Marcinkiewicz, J (2452) ICCF email 2004, 1-0 (39).] 13...Qe8 14.Bd3 Bf5 15.g4! [15.Nxf5? gxf5 16.Bxd4 exd4 17.Nb5 e5 18.Nxc7 Qg6 19.Nxa8 Rxa8© 20.a4 e4 21.a5 Nd7 22.Bf1 d3 23.Rb1 Rc8 24.Qh5 Qxh5 25.Rxh5 Rxc4µ White resigned at this early point, trusting his strong opponent to convert in Glaser, H (2458) – Marcinkiewicz, J (2427) ICCF email 2001.] 15...Bxd3 16.Qxd3



Position after: 16.Qxd3

The g6-pawn is under fire but if Black defends it or trades knights with 16...Nf3+, the initiative will belong to his opponent. A sharper option, like 16...c6!? or 16...e6, therefore needs to be checked. Here's a sample messy line after the latter option (16...e6): 17.Nxg6 exd5 18.Nxf8 Nf3+ 19.Kd1 e4 20.Qc2 Nxc4 21.Nh7 c6 22.g5 Qg6∞.

10.d5



Position after: 10.d5

10...Nd4

10...Nb4?! 11.a3 Na6 12.h5f is likely too dangerous for Black.

11.Nxd4 exd4 12.Bxd4 Bxd4!

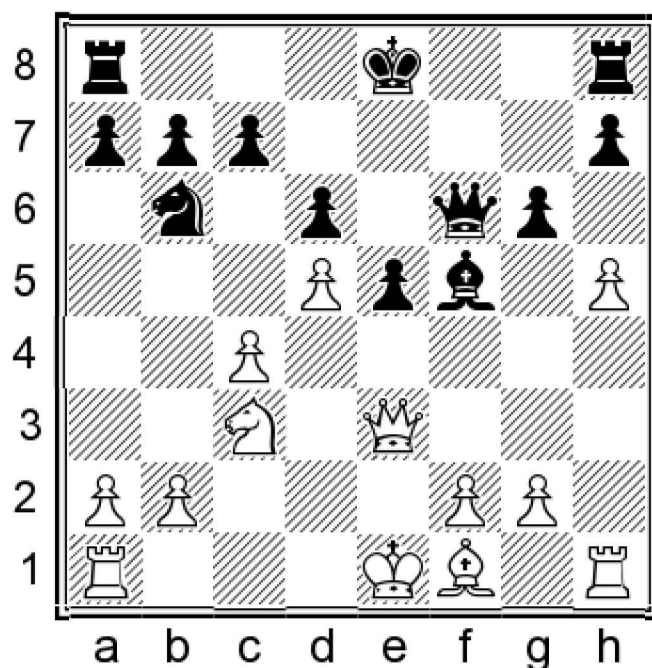
I guess the black monarch runs greater risks in the event of 12...0-0

13.Bxg7 Kxg7 14.h5f Gutsche, D (2507) – Wigbout, M (2309) ICCF email 2003.

13.Qxd4 e5 14.Qe3

Or 14.dxe6 0-0.

14...Bf5 15.h5 Qf6²



Position after: 15...Qf6²

This was Gross, M (2212) – Kerr, S (2554) ICCF email 2008, ½-½ (70).

Black held this slightly worse position, but given the fact that he was rated over 300 points more than his opponent, this can't be considered such a great success.

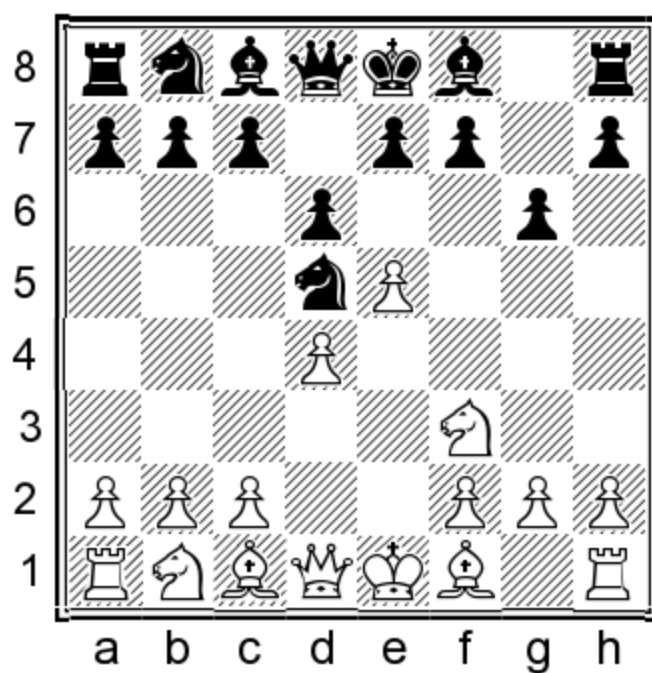
To summarize, if White knows that after the pawn sacrifice 6.e6 fxe6 he is supposed to go for a quick h2-h4 combined with Be3, Black has to take serious risks if he doesn't want to defend the slightly worse positions that derive from the sequence of moves ...e5 d5 ...Nd4 Nxd4 ...exd4 and then, depending on the circumstances, Qxd4 ...e5 or Bxd4 ...Bxd4 Qxd4 ...e5.

(back to the text) This position could arise via the move order 1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.c4 Nb6 5.exd6 exd6 6.Nf3 Nc6 (see the relevant section for more details), where 6.Nf3 is much rarer than 6.Nc3 and in return 6...Nc6 less frequent than 6...Be7 or 6...Bg4.

Chapter 7

Modern Variation with 4...g6

1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.Nf3 g6



Chapter Guide

Chapter 7 – Modern Variation with 4...g6

1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.Nf3 g6 5.Bc4 Nb6 6.Bb3 Bg7

a) 5.Ng5 alternative b) 7.--

c) 7.Qe2 Nc6

d) 7.Qe2 0-0

e) 7.0-0

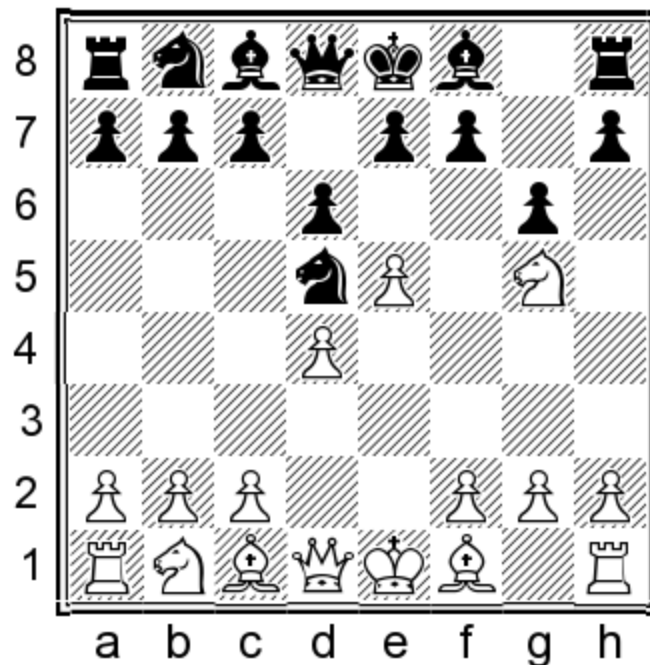
f) 7.Ng5 e6 8.f4 dxe5 9.fxe5

g) 7.Ng5 e6 8.f4 dxe5 9.dxe5

h) 7.Ng5 e6 8.Qf3 Qd7, 8...0-0

i) 7.Ng5 e6 8.Qf3 Qe7

a) 5.Ng5 alternative 1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.Nf3 g6 5.Ng5!?

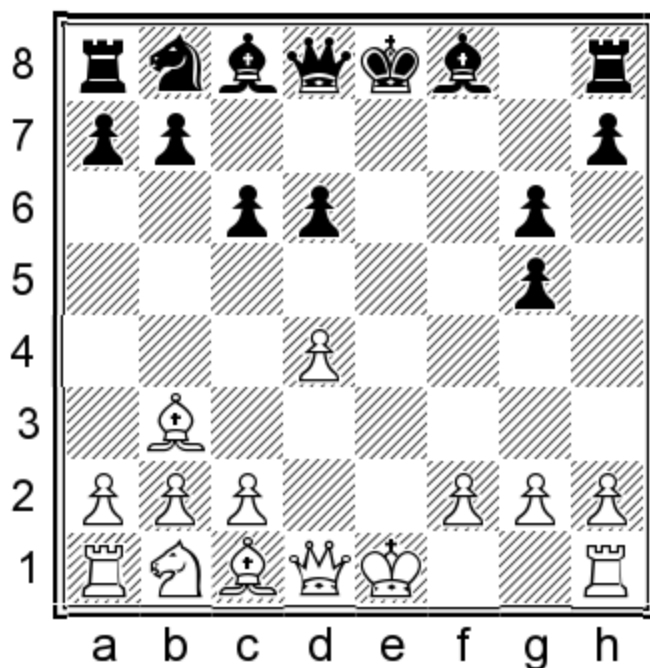


Position after: 5.Ng5!?

This crude knight-sally could unsettle an inexperienced player, but moving a piece twice in a row contravenes basic chess principles. Nevertheless, for the time being Black needs to find a solution to the dual threat of Qf3 and Nxf7.

5...dxe5!

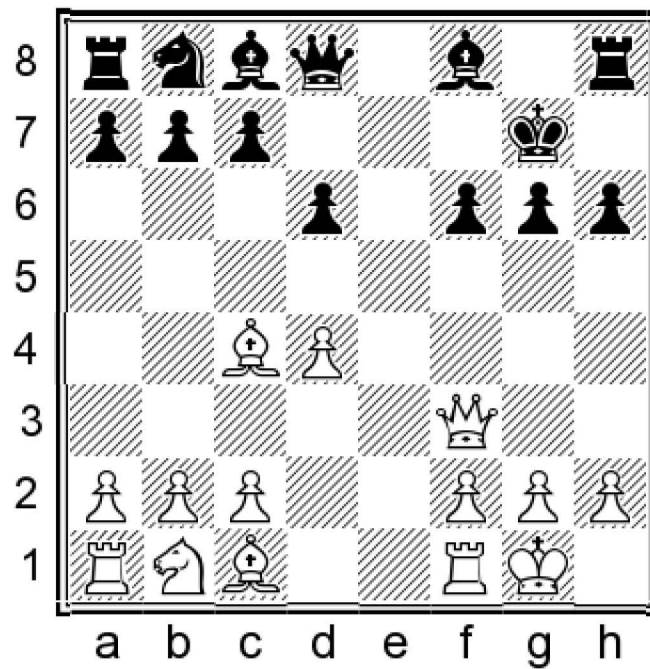
A) 5...f6? is a kind of panicky move, leaving White well on top after 6.exf6 exf6 7.Bc4 fxe5 8.Bxd5 c6 9.Bb3



Position after: 9.Bb3

Mnatsakanian, E (2425) – Alburt, L (2505) Tbilisi 1977.

B) The first victim of 5...h6? was Rellstab vs Wagner in their 1930 encounter in Swinemuende, which continued 6.Nxf7! Kxf7 7.Qf3+ Nf6 [7...Ke6? 8.Bd3+–] 8.exf6 exf6 9.Bc4+ Kg7 10.0-0±.



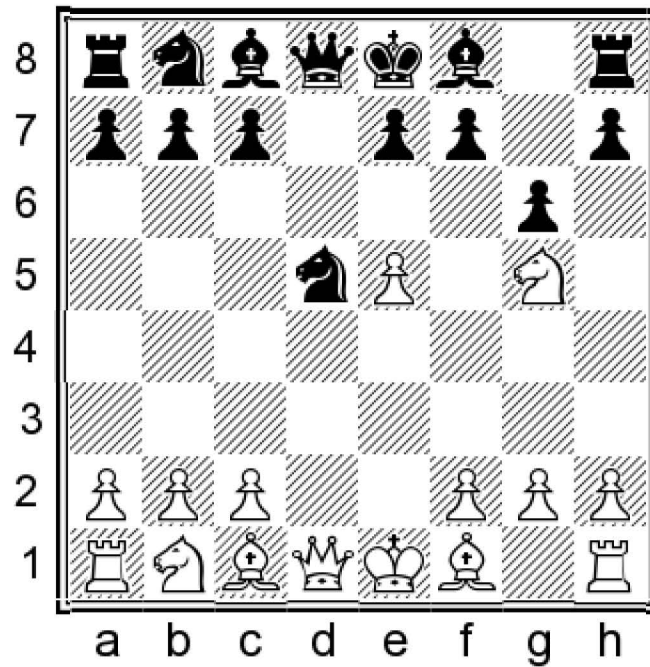
Position after: 10.0-0±

Funnily, that exact position was reached 85 years later in the rapid game Meribanov, V (2390) – Bortnyk, O (2539) Luts'k 2015, which however Black managed to win!

C) 5...c6 is a fairly reliable alternative, and in fact C&K's main line. However, to my taste it gives White too many options. Among 6.h4, 6.f4, 6.Bc4, 6.Qf3 and finally 6.c4 I regard the two last-mentioned moves as the most promising for him.

6.Bc4

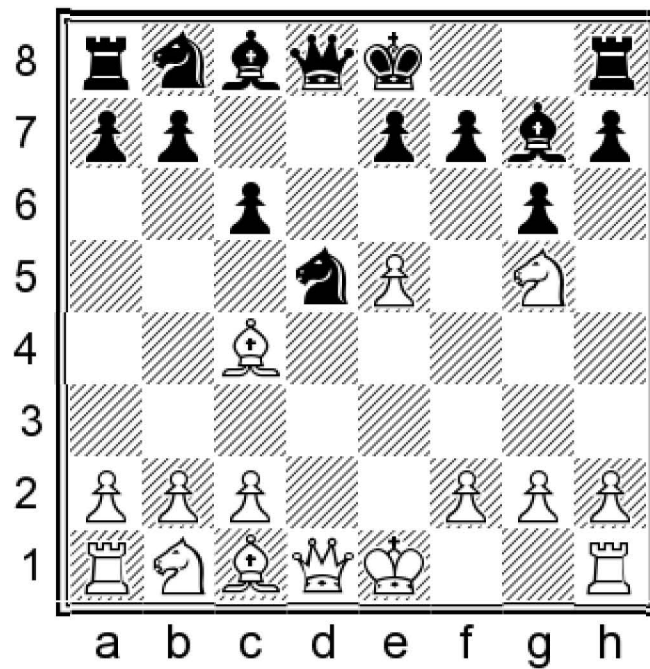
6.dxe5



Position after: 6.dxe5

6...Bg7! [This move is stronger and more natural than 6...f6?! which occurred in Dirr, U (2275) – Novkovic, M (2400) Austria 1998. Black probably got nervous about the looming c2-c4 but following 7.Bc4 c6 8.exf6 exf6 9.Qe2+ Be7 10.Ne4² White enjoyed a pleasant edge.] Now 7.Bc4 [the erroneous 7.c4?! Nb4³ already turns in Black's favor] 7...c6 8.Nc3 is likely to transpose into the main line 6.Bc4.

6...c6 7.dxe5 Bg7

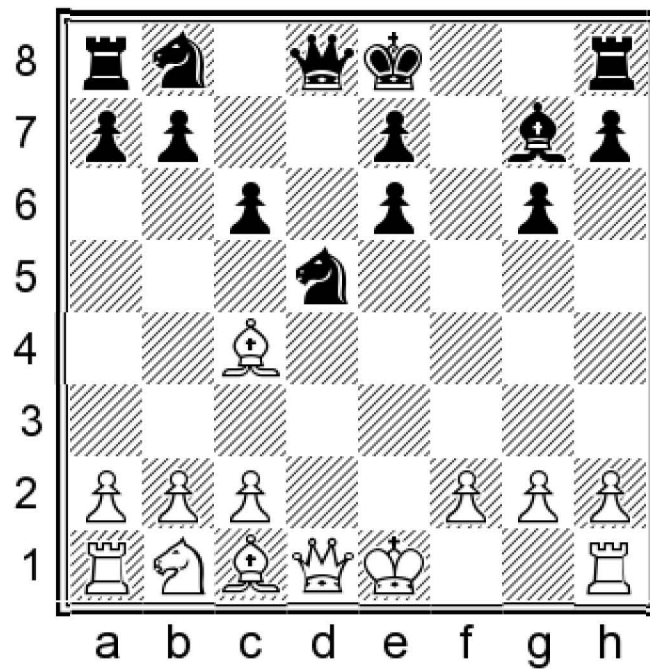


Position after: 7...Bg7

8.e6!?

The principled attempt. After 8.Nc3 h6 9.Nge4 Bxe5 10.Nxd5 the players agreed to a draw in this equal position, Ivanovic, B (2476) – Neverov, V (2547) Novi Sad 2000.

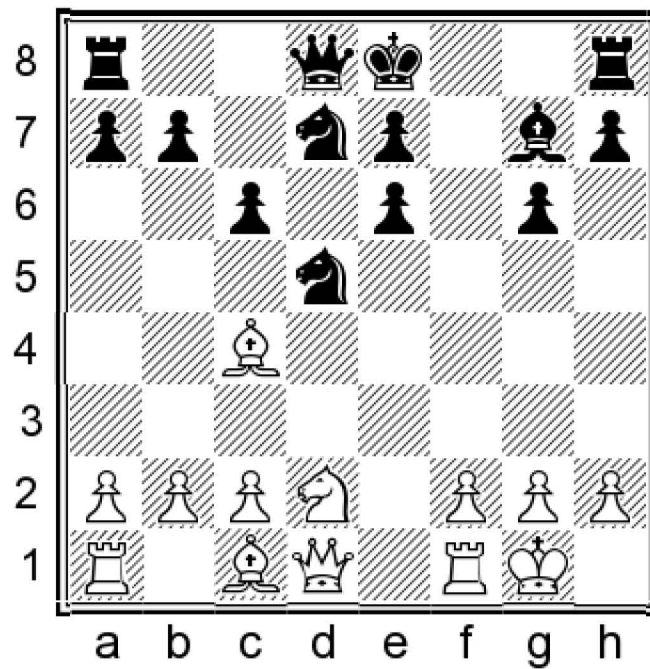
8...Bxe6 9.Nxe6 fxe6



Position after: 9...fxe6

Penrose, J (2365) – Cafferty, B (2355) Bristol 1968. According to C&K, the late GM Bagirov, an Alekhine expert, judged this position as clearly in White's favor, whereas I tend to agree with them that chances are reciprocal here. Black can defend his weak e6-pawn with ...Qd6 and complete his development by means of ...0-0 followed by ...Nd7.

10.Nd2 Nd7 11.0-0

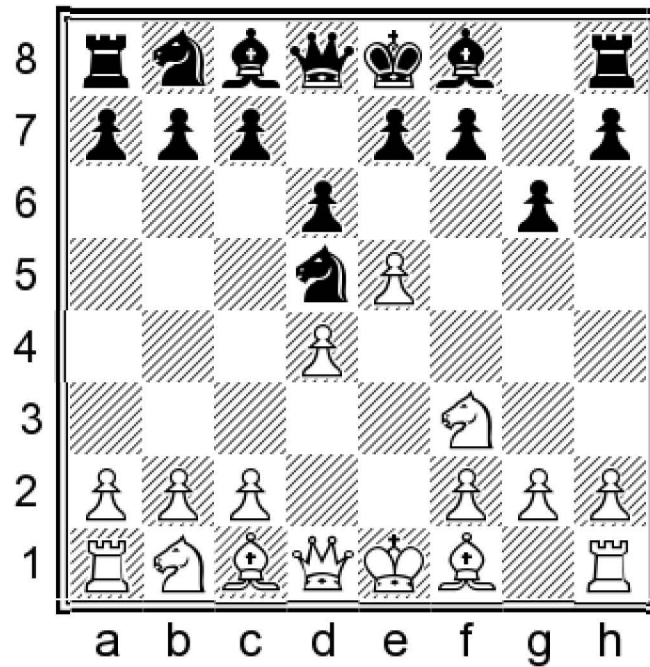


Position after: 11.0-0

Now Black has many ways to continue. C&K suggest **11...b5**, but I'd rather go **11...Qc7** followed by ...0-0-0 or **11...Ne5**∞.

b) 7.--

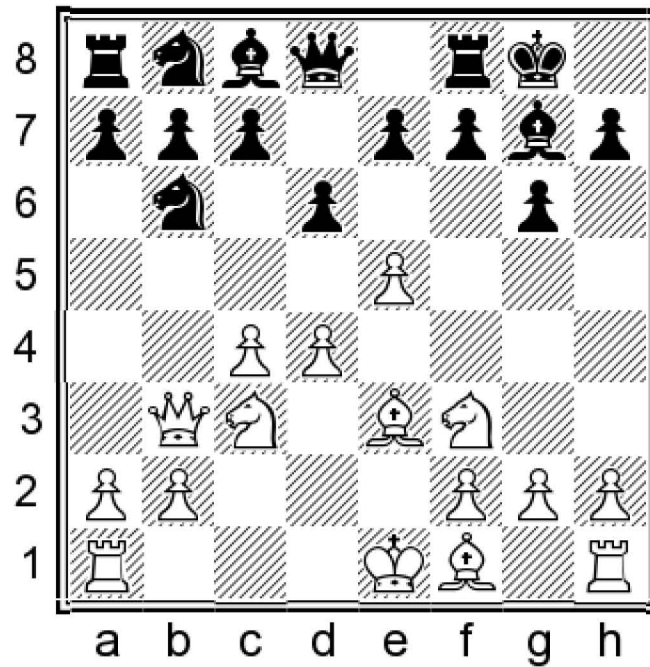
1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.Nf3 g6



Position after: 4...g6

5.Bc4

5.c4 Nb6 6.Nc3 Bg7 7.Be3 0-0 8.Qb3 I found only three games which reached this interesting setup, similar to the 1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.c4 Nb6 5.f4 g6 6.Nc3 Bg7 line.

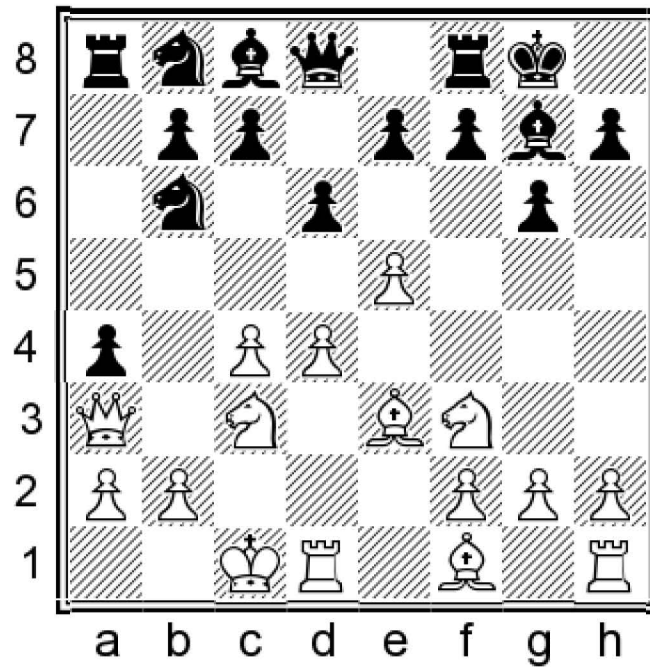


Position after: 8.Qb3

If White may miss his f-pawn at f4 in some lines, he is in return a tempo up for operations linked with c4-c5, possibly preceded by 0-0-0.

A) 8...dxe5 was played in the most relevant of the aforementioned games, and obviously other moves are interesting too. 9.Nxe5 N6d7 [Perhaps more suitable was 9...c5 10.Rd1 cxd4 11.Bxd4 Qe8.] 10.0-0-0 [10.Rd1² is safer.] 10...c5 11.Nxd7 Nxd7 12.dxc5 Qa5,, Fritsche, F (2235) – Schmitzer, K (2230) email 2003.

B) 8...a5 9.0-0-0 a4 10.Qa3



Position after: 10.Qa3

This occurred in the blitz game Zajarnyi, A – Bauer, C lichess 2020, where rather than 10...Bg4?! it would have been smarter to opt for 10...Be6! ∞ . In turn, White wasn't forced to go for the committal 9.0-0-0 and I leave it to you to explore the alternatives 9.c5, 9.Rd1 and 9.Be2.

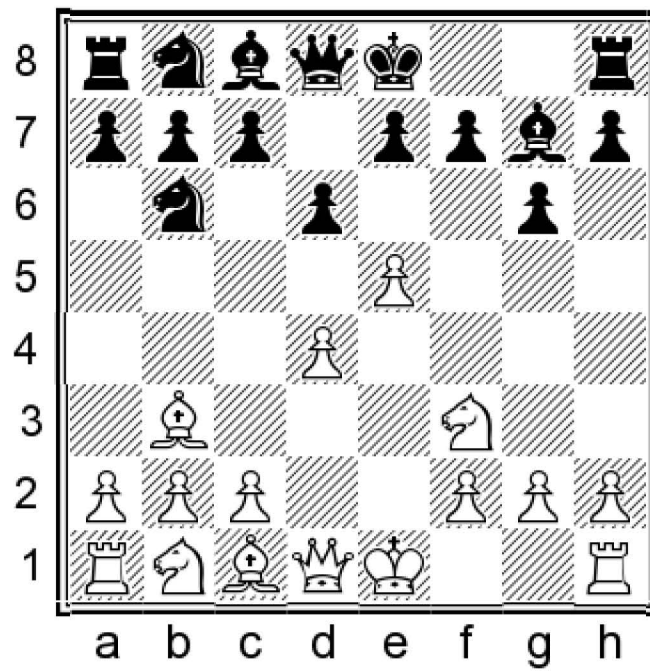
5...Nb6

5...c6 is valid too and could lead to similar positions as the line 4...dxe5 5.Nxe5 g6 if Black recaptures ...Qxd6 after a subsequent exd6. I will not delve into this possibility, less active than the knight retreat, since Black can't go ...c7-c5 then.

6.Bb3

Other bishop retreats make little sense and allow Black easy equalization.

6...Bg7

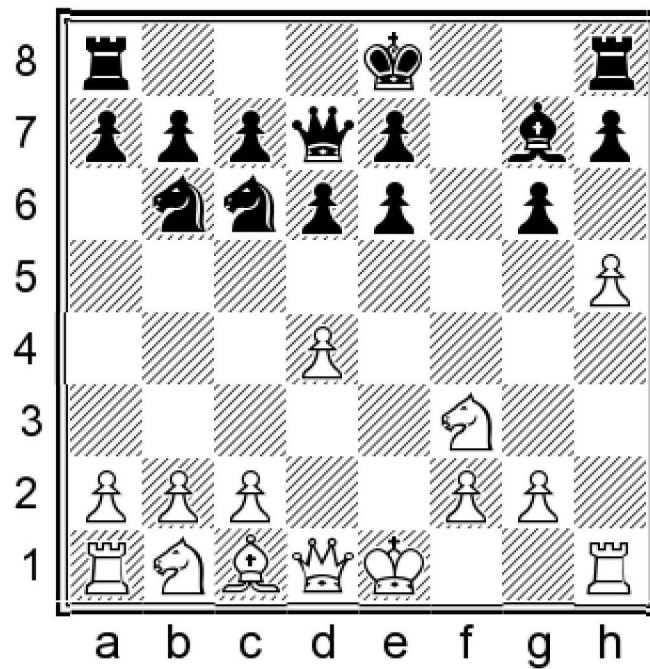


Position after: 6...Bg7

7.a4

A) 7.e6? doesn't give White enough. 7...Bxe6 8.Bxe6 fxe6

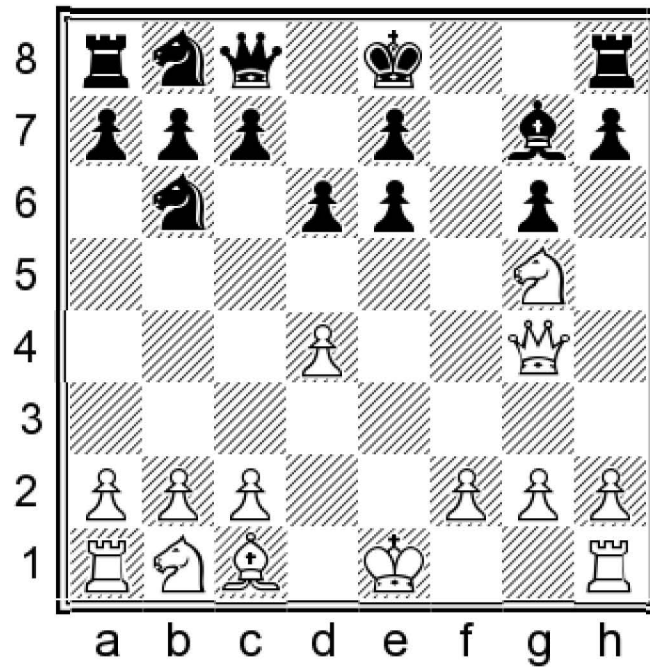
A1) 9.h4 Nc6 10.h5 Qd7



Position after: 10...Qd7

Lhagvasuren, C (2200) – Chekhov, V (2495) Moscow 1986. Black has kept his extra pawn and is ready to castle long; he stands much better.

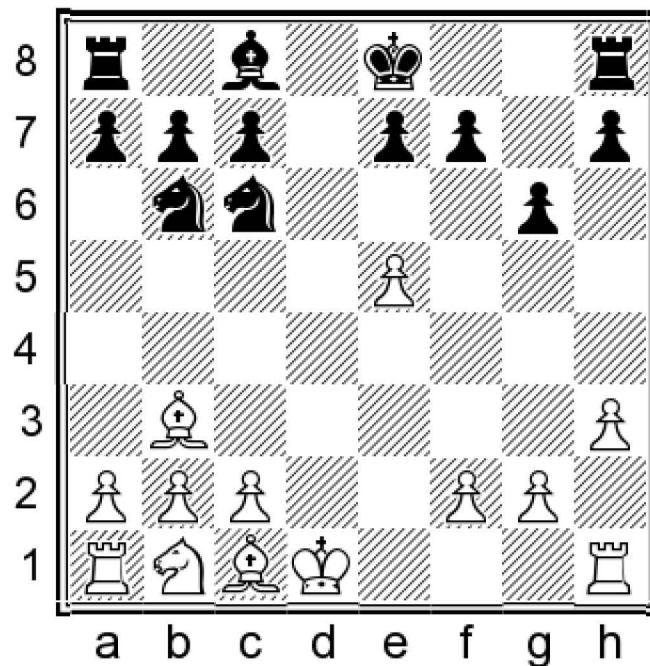
A2) 9.Ng5 represents no real improvement: 9...Qc8 [9...Qd7!?] 10.Qg4



Position after: 10.Qg4

10...Bf6 [10...Nc6 11.Nxe6 Bxd4 is equally good] 11.Nc3 [or 11.Nxe6 Nc6] 11...Nc6 12.Nce4 e5µ Asker, S (2445) – Riemer, W (2400) ICCF corr 1988. Black is too quick in the center for White to generate any serious kingside attack.

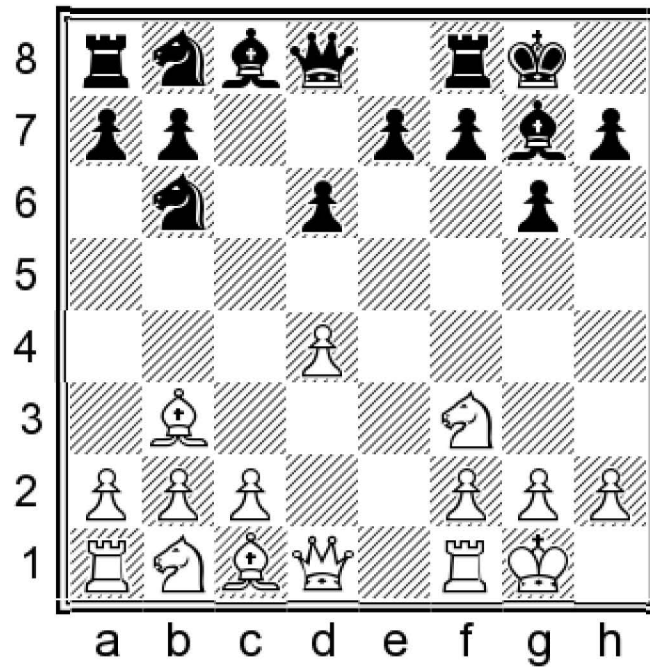
B) 7.h3?! dxe5 8.Nxe5 Bxe5! 9.dxe5 Qxd1+ 10.Kxd1 Nc6 [10...a5!?!]



Position after: 10...Nc6

This was Dave, D (2170) – Mosquera, M (2395) Barcelona 2012. White can't protect his e5-pawn and safeguard his bishop pair at the same time, so the position is at best equal for him.

C) 7.exd6 Releasing the central tension can be seen as a concession. In comparison with lines deriving from 1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.c4 Nb6 5.exd6 cxd6. White will be able, and often need, to support his d-pawn by means of c2-c3 (indeed, pushing c2-c4 feels wrong). This leads to his getting a solid position but few chances of putting real pressure on his opponent. 7...cxd6 8.0-0 0-0

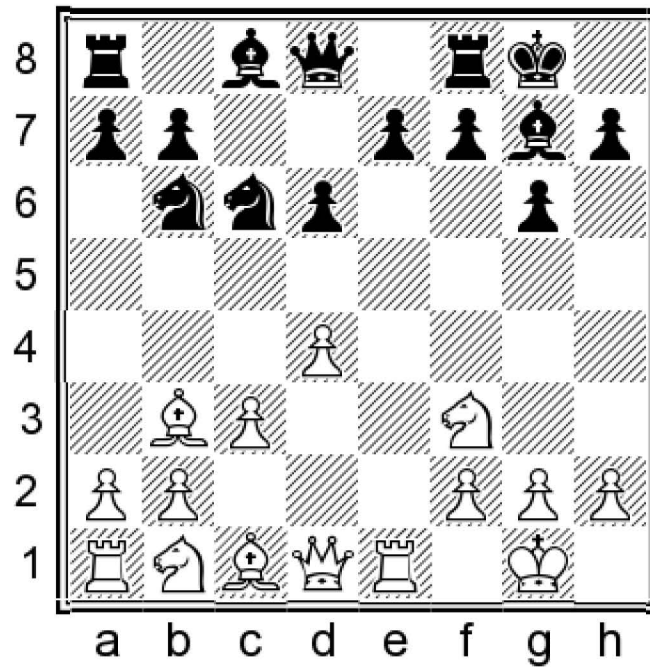


Position after: 8...0-0

At this point several different move orders are possible. White may start with 9.h3 if he wants to rule out the pin ...Bc8-g4, but that seems superfluous to me. Here you have two recent examples of how play can develop.

C1) 9.c3 Qc7 10.a4 Nc6 11.Na3 a6 12.d5 Na5 13.Re1?! [13.Bc2=] 13...Nxb3 14.Qxb3 e6 15.dxe6 Bxe6³ Hovhannisyan, R (2641) – Ter Sahakyan, S (2617) Yerevan 2020.

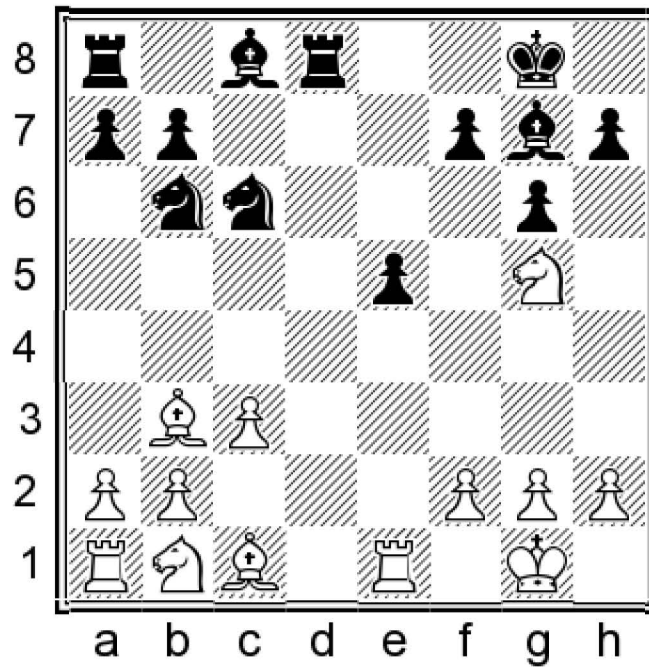
C2) 9.Re1 Nc6 10.c3



Position after: 10.c3

C2.1) 10...Bf5 11.Na3 [11.d5 Na5 ∞] 11...Qd7 12.Bc2 Bxc2 13.Nxc2= Grischuk, A (2747) – Bortnyk, O (2579) ICC 2016.

C2.2) 10...e5 The ending ensuing after 11.dxe5!? (11.Bg5 Qc7 12.Na3 a6 ∞ Black is fine here, and his next moves could be a mixture of ...exd4, ...Kh8 followed by ...f7-f5, ...Bf5 and/or ...Na5) 11...dxe5 12.Qxd8 Rxd8 13.Ng5 might be a trifle better for White but Black drew the three high-level correspondence duels where it took place.



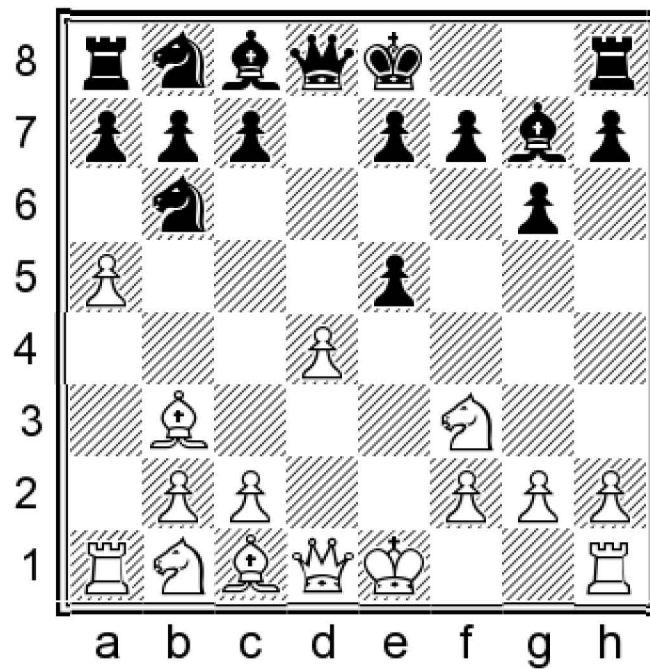
Position after: 13.Ng5

As ...Na5, chasing away or swapping the irritating bishop, is imminent, Black seems to have fewer issues to solve than in the Voronezh ending. 13...Rf8 [13...Rd7!?] 14.Ne4 Na5 Black had achieved a rough equality the blitz game Stevic, H (2587) – Dimitrov, R (2534) Skopje 2018.

7...dxe5!

This critical move neutralizes the a-pawn thrust, according to theory. As often happens, laziness can save you time, and here you can reduce your preparation workload if you opt for the small concession After 7...a5 the same logical moves as without a2-a4 and ...a7-a5 represent White's main attempts, namely 8.Ng5, 8.0-0 and 8.Qe2. They are all covered on move 7, so you have good markers if you want to find the nuances.

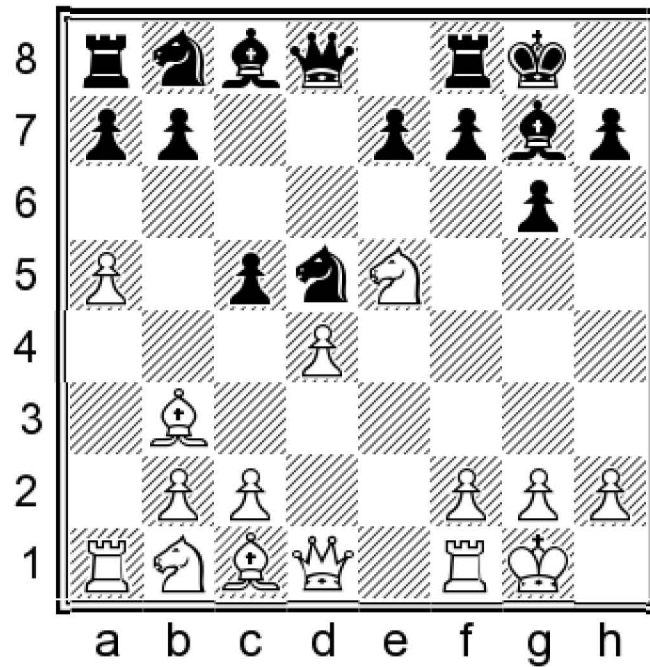
8.a5



Position after: 8.a5

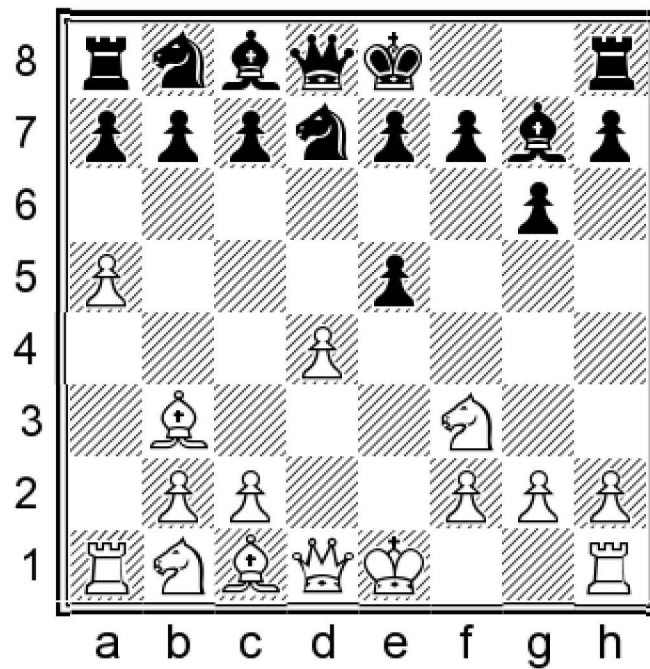
8...N6d7

8...Nd5?! leaves White a pleasant choice between 9.dxe5² Kudrin, S (2530) – Alburt, L (2535) Los Angeles 1991 and 9.Nxe5², with an improved version of the 1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.Nf3 dxe5 5.Nxe5 g6 line. For instance, 9...0-0 10.0-0 c5?!



Position after: 10...c5?!

Nunn, J – Schroll, G Vienna 1991. Now the thunderbolt 11.Nxf7! came and gave White a clear edge following 11...Kxf7 12.Qf3+. Capturing 11...Rxf7?! was even worse in view of 12.dxc5 followed by 13.c4.

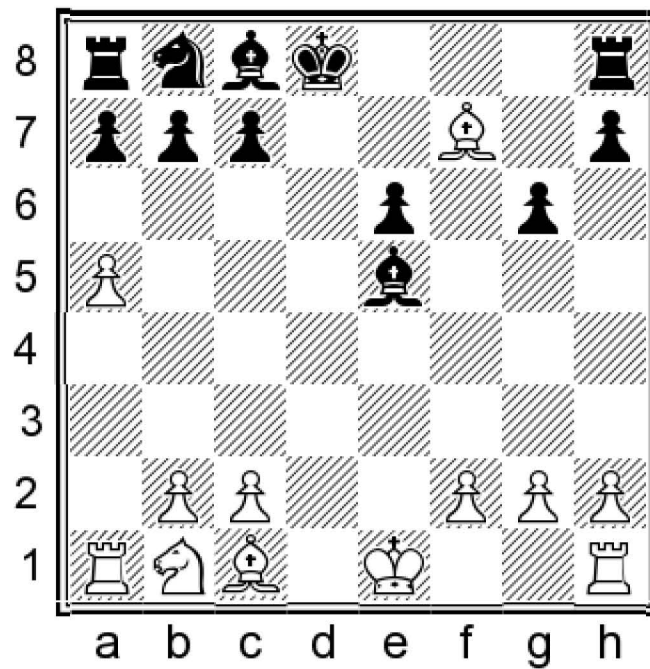


Position after: 8...N6d7

9.Bxf7+

A) 9.Ng5? e6 10.Bxe6 0-0! is already better for Black.

B) 9.dxe5!? With 24 games (vs 136 for 9.Bxf7+) having followed this path, I find it a very interesting practical choice. Black needs some precise knowledge (which he doesn't always have when it comes to secondary lines). The arising endgame is far from being a dead draw. 9...Nxe5 10.Qxd8+ Kxd8 11.Nxe5 Bxe5 12.Bxf7 e6



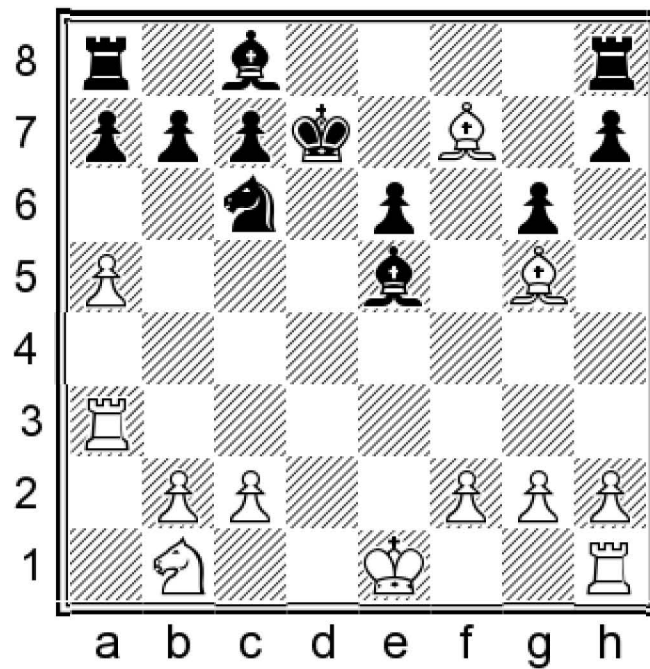
Position after: 12...e6

White has restored material parity but for that purpose he had to let his bishop get trapped. This explains why play now has a forced character.

13.Bg5+ Kd7 14.Ra3

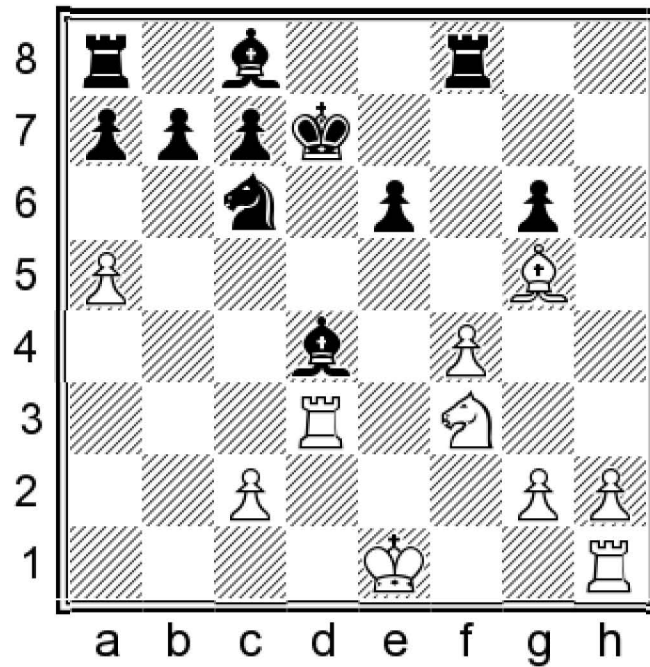
B1) 14...Rf8?! 15.Rf3 Nc6 16.Bxe6+ Ke8 This happened in the high-level Chinese duel Hou, Y (2653) – Ding, L (2778) Danzhou 2016, where instead of 17.Bxc8?! White would have kept an edge with 17.Bd5!
2.

B2) 14...Nc6



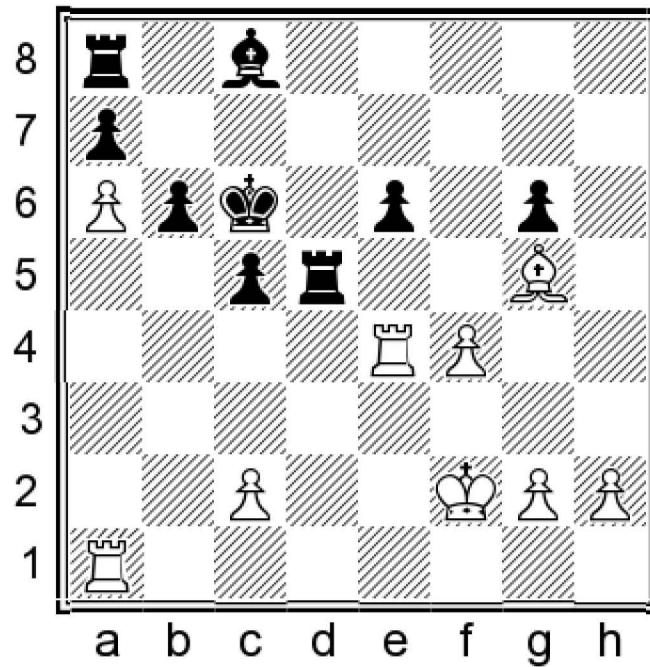
Position after: 14...Nc6

15.f4 [15.Rd3+ Bd6 16.Rh3 Ne5 17.Bf6 Rf8 18.Bxe5 Rxf7 19.Bxd6 cxd6= Uberos Fernandez, A (2313) – Rain, R (2244) ICCF email 2016. As mentioned earlier, an approximately equal endgame is no guarantee that the game will end peacefully in an over-the-board encounter, so any result remains possible.] 15...Bxb2 16.Rd3+ Bd4 17.Nd2 Rf8 18.Bxg6 hxg6 19.Nf3



Position after: 19.Nf3

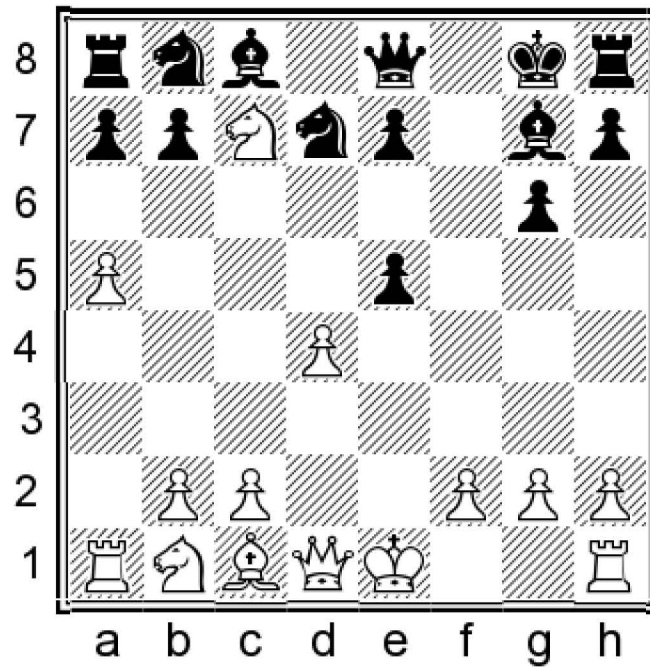
19...Rf5 [Nobody has tried 19...b6 20.Nxd4 Ba6 yet but this could be OK too.] 20.Nxd4 Nxd4 21.Rxd4+ Kc6 22.Rc4+ Kd7 [22...Kd6!?] 23.Kf2 b6! [This must be a refinement over 23...Rxa5?! 24.Bf6² Cvak, R (2237) – Rain, R (2278) ICCF email 2014 since it was used in a later game by the same Black player.] That more recent game went 24.Ra1 Rd5 25.a6 c5 26.Re4 Kc6[∞]



Position after: 26...Kc6

Domancich, E (2415) – Rain, R (2251) ICCF email 2015. See my note to 9.dxe5!?. Speaking from the White perspective, if your opponent has to remember everything until that point to be theoretically safe, the probability that you will reach this position is quite low.

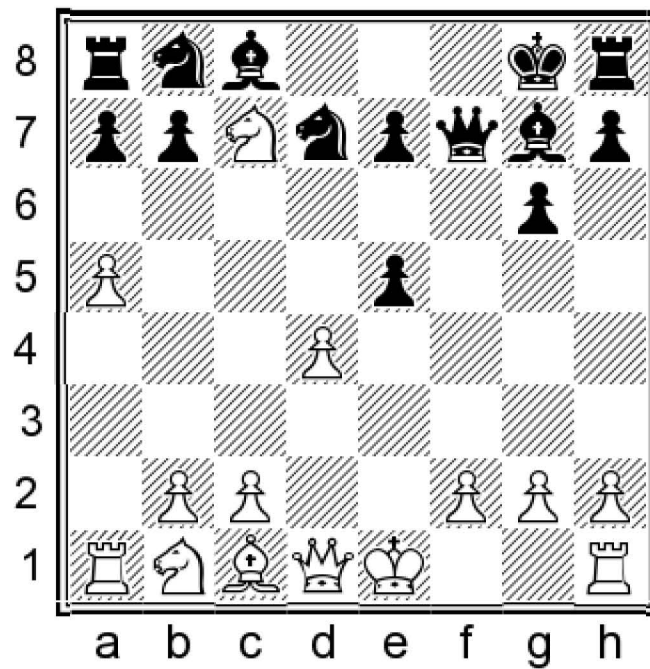
9...Kxf7 10.Ng5+ Kg8 11.Ne6 Qe8 12.Nxc7



Position after: 12.Nxc7

12...Qd8

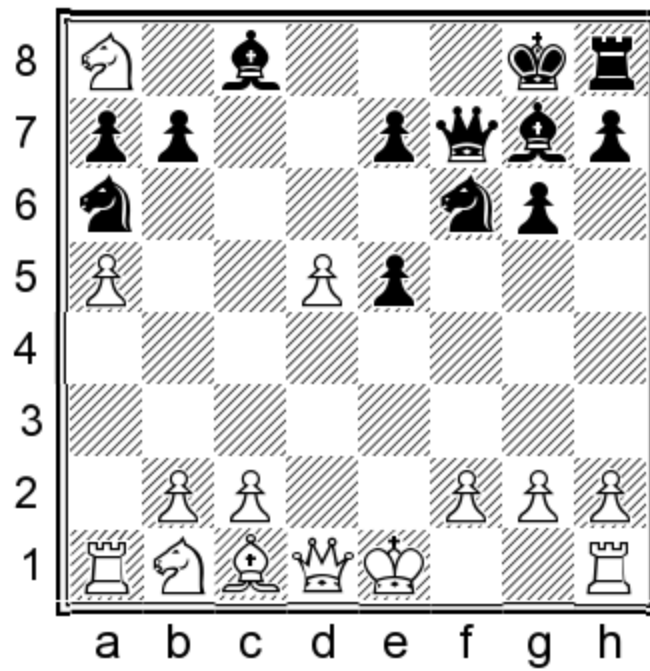
12...Qf7!? Only six games continued this way vs more than 150 with the “compulsory” 12...Qd8. While Kornev doesn’t even mention it, C&K go so far as calling it a mistake, but I disagree with them. Some sample lines follow to convince you that it is fully playable.



Position after: 12...Qf7!?

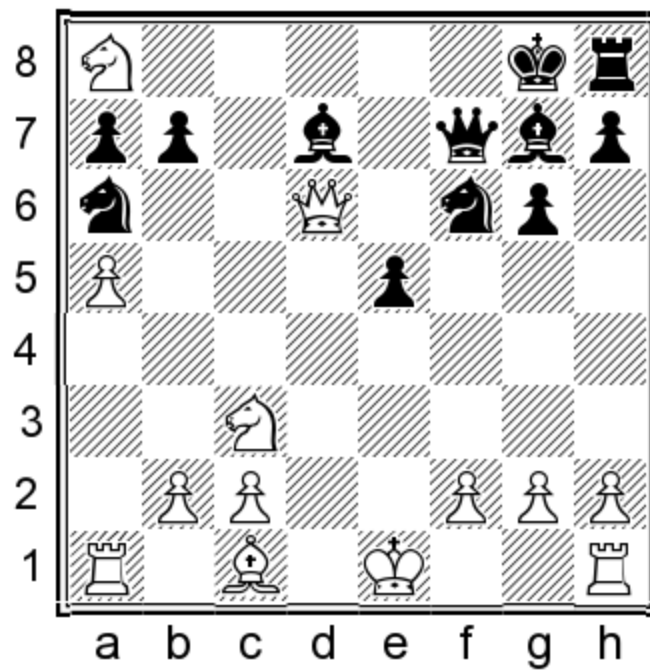
A) 13.dxe5!? Bxe5 14.Nxa8 Nc6 15.0-0 Kg7∞ Black is intending ...Nf6, ...Bf5 and ...Rxa8.

B) 13.d5 Na6 14.Nxa8 Nf6



Position after: 14...Nf6

B1) Now 15.Nc3 is the two Russians' main line. 15...Bd7 [15...Bf5!?!]
16.d6 exd6 17.Qxd6

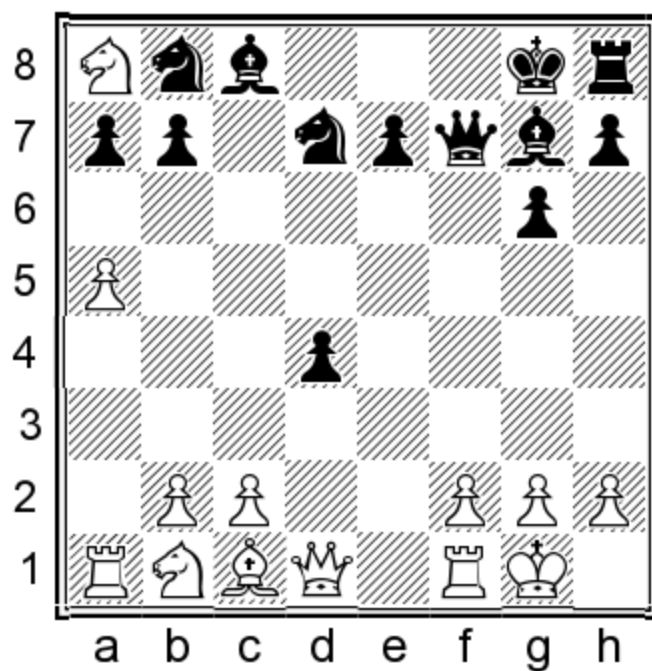


Position after: 17.Qxd6

They stop here with the verdict that Black is close to lost but to me things remain murky after 17...Bc6. Black's idea of ...h6 (or ...h5), ...Kh7 and ...Rxa8 isn't easy to parry, for example 18.Be3 h5 19.Bxa7 Kh7 20.Nb6 Bxg2∞.

B2) 15.Be3!? Qf8 16.Bxa7 [16.b4?! Bf5 17.c3 Qxa8³ Bolzoni, V – Polaczek, R Lyon 1990] 16...Bg4 17.f3 Qxa8 18.Bb6 Bf5∞ Du Jardin, J – Polaczek, R corr 1991.

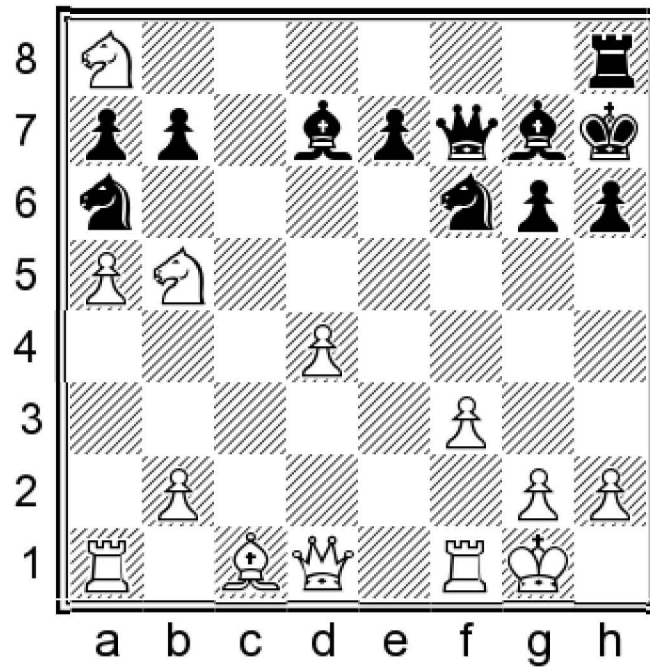
C) 13.Nxa8 exd4 14.0-0



Position after: 14.0-0

14...Na6 [14...h6?! Cao, S – Nguyen, TV Vietnam 2003 and 14...e5?! Malyi, V (2250) – Bortnyk, M (2423) Mukachevo 2013 are both inferior due to 15.Nc7!] 15.c3 h6 16.cxd4 Kh7 [16...Nf6!?]

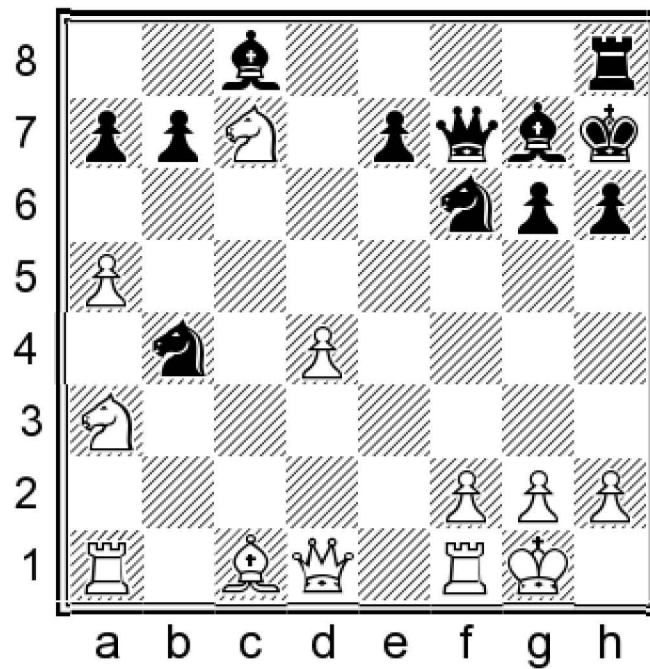
C1) 17.Nc3 Nf6?! [17...Rd8!∞] 18.Nb5? [18.Qf3! Rf8²] 18...Bg4 19.f3 Bd7μ



Position after: 19...Bd7

Strangely, the database claims that Gunnas, M – Polaczek, R corr 1992 was agreed drawn at this point, although 20.Nac7 Nxc7 21.Nxc7 Rc8 is clearly better for Black: 22.Bf4 Nh5!.

C2) 17.Na3 Nf6 18.b4! Nxb4 [18...Rd8!?] 19.Nc7



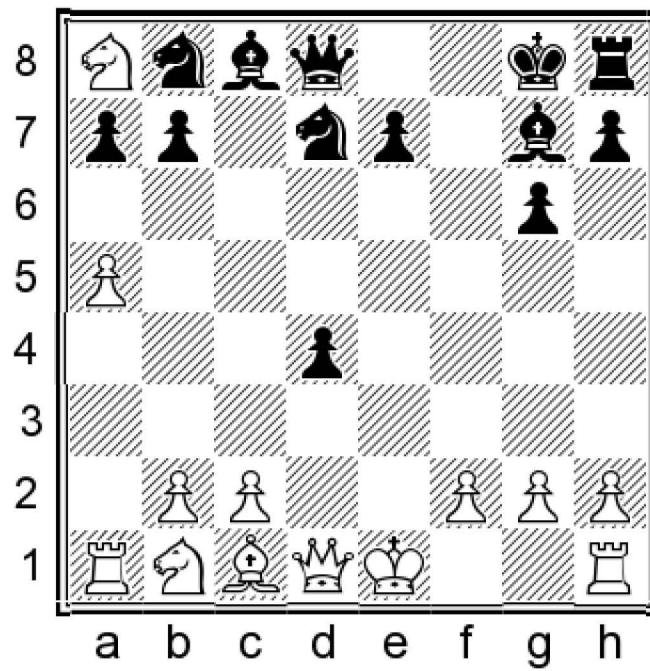
Position after: 19.Nc7

This happened in Lau, R (2500) – Posch, W (2210) St Veit 1996, where rather than 19...a6?! 20.Qa4 Nc6 21.Bb2 with a nice white plus, Black could have kept things unclear with 19...Rd8!. Overall White may find a way to extract some advantage after 12...Qf7, but that move certainly needs scrutiny.

13.Nxa8

13.Ne6 Qe8=

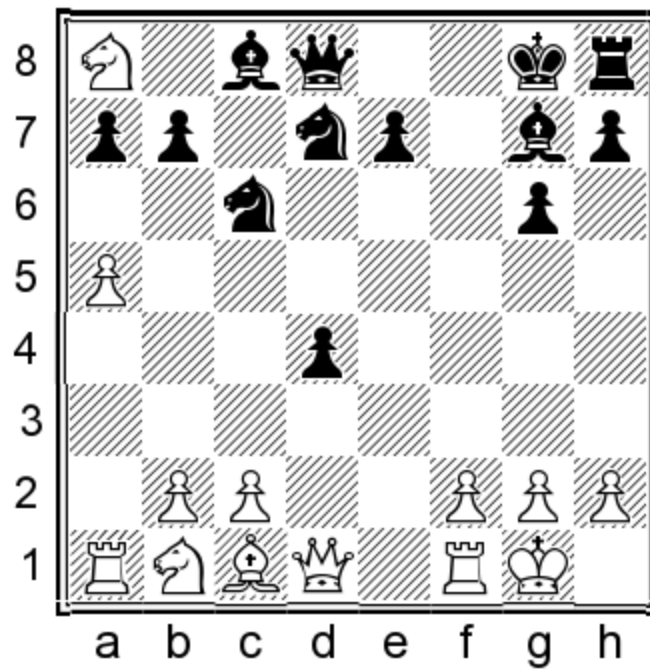
13...exd4



Position after: 13...exd4

14.c3!

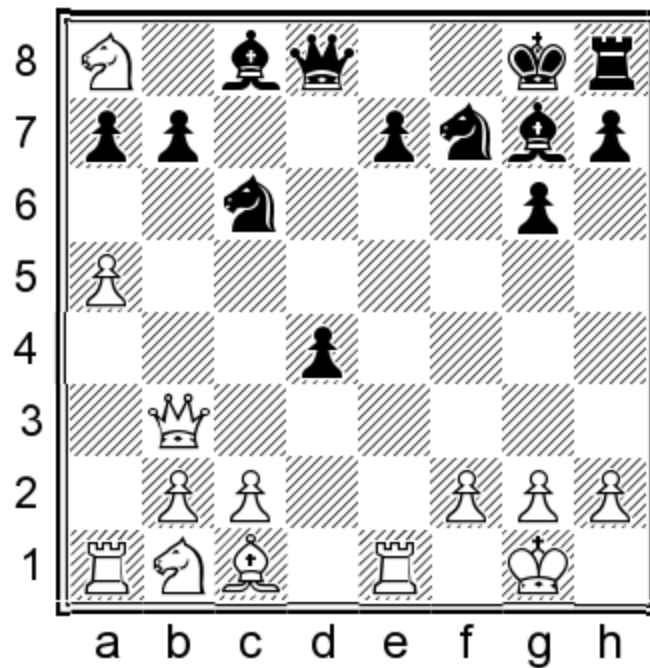
The natural 14.0-0 looks less demanding. 14...Nc6



Position after: 14...Nc6

A) 15.Qf3

A1) 15...Nde5 16.Qb3+ Nf7 17.Re1

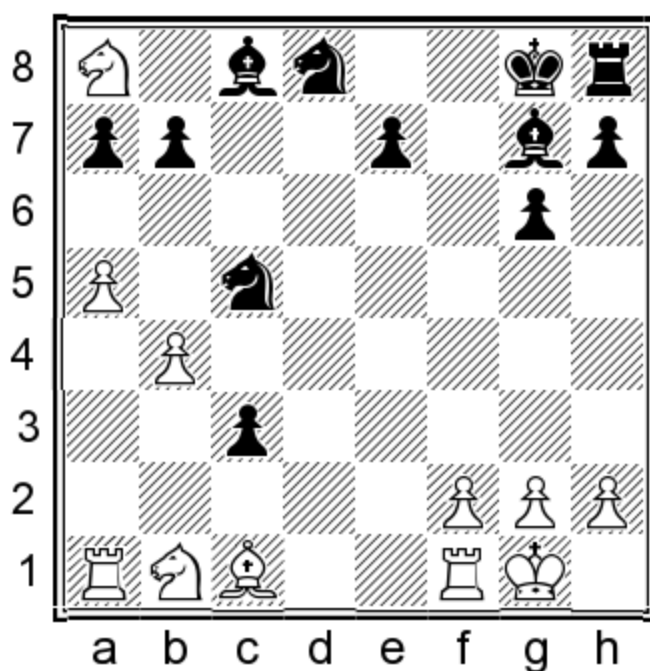


Position after: 17.Re1

17...Qd6? [17...Bf6 should be better for Black, though he will need patience before eating the cornered knight] 18.a6 bxa6 19.Nd2∞ Limayo, E (2430) – Rain, R (2452) ICCF email 2003.

A2) 15...h6 16.Nb6 axb6 17.a6 bxa6 18.Qxc6 Kh7 Perez Perez, A (2369) – Rain, R (2383) ICCF email 2005.

B) 15.c3 Nc5 16.b4 dxc3 17.Qxd8+ Nxd8



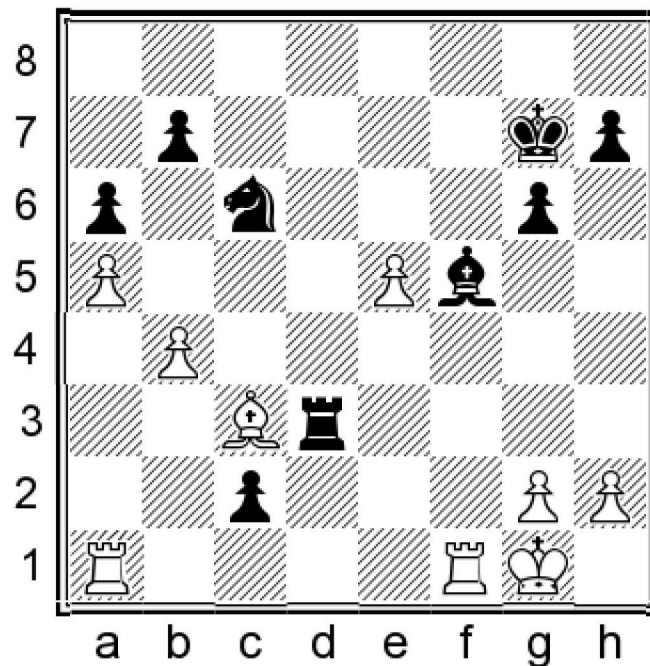
Position after: 17...Nxd8

This endgame has been discussed a few times and the final verdict is that Black is fine. Here are some sample lines.

B1) 18.Ra3 Ne4

B1.1) 19.Re1? c2 20.Nd2 Nxd2 21.Bxd2 Kf7μ [21...Bf6? 22.Nc7 turns the tables]

B1.2) 19.Nc7 c2 20.Nd2 Nxd2 21.Bxd2 Nc6 22.Ne8 Bf5 23.Nxg7 Kxg7 24.Bc3+ e5 25.f4 Rd8 26.fxe5 a6 27.Raa1 Rd3



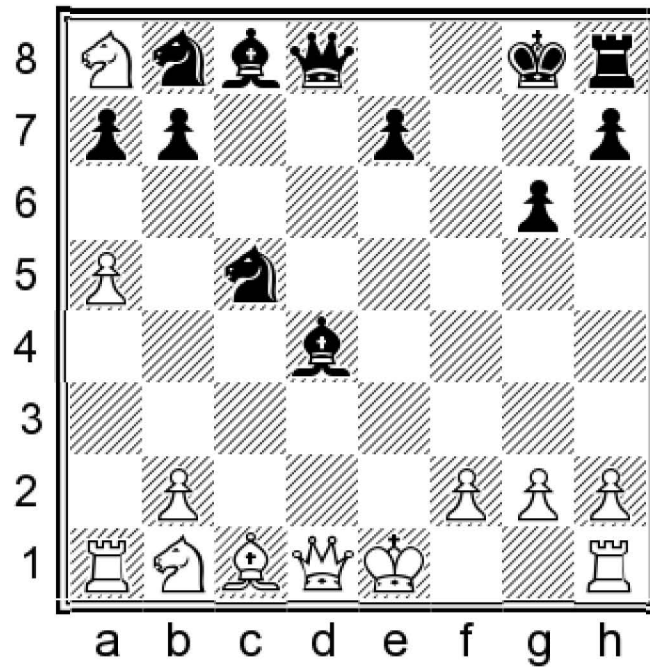
Position after: 27...Rd3

In view of the unavoidable repetition 28.Rf3 Rd1+ 29.Rf1 Rd3 a draw was agreed in Hernandez Molina, D (2302) – Rain, R (2391) ICCF email 2007.

B2) 18.bxc5 c2 19.Nc3 Bxc3 20.Ra2 Kf7 21.Nc7 [or 21.a6 Bf5=] 21...Nc6 22.Nb5 Be5 23.Rxc2 Bf5= Moret, F (2164) – Fister, B (2331) ICCF email 2012.

14...h6

14...Nc5 Is the most popular move at this juncture, which however leads to nebulous complications where correspondence players have experienced problems as Black following 15.cxd4 Bxd4. Some examples follow.



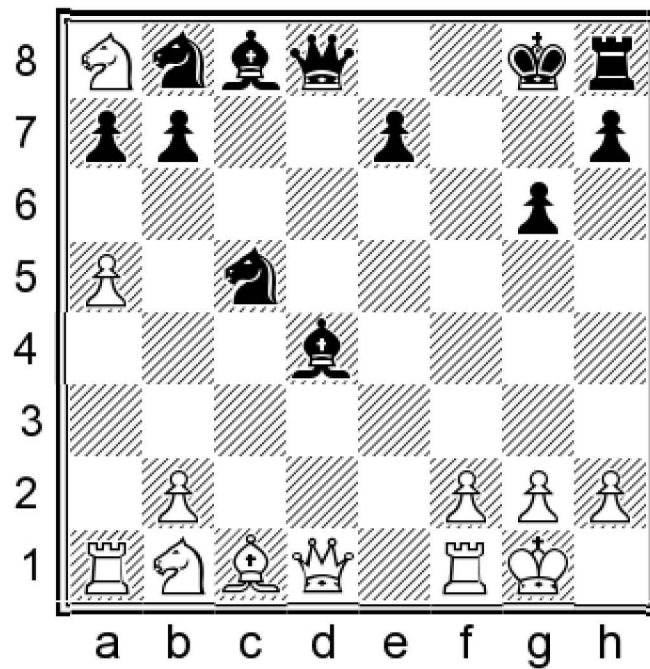
Position after: 15...Bxd4

A) 16.Be3

A1) 16...Nc6 17.0-0 Popov, V (2269) – Rain, R (2253) ICCF email 2014 – see 16.0-0 Nc6 [17.Nc7!?!].

A2) 16...e5 17.0-0 will likely transpose into another line [whereas the trade 17.Bxd4?! is misguided: 17...exd4 18.0-0 Nba6³ Oral, T (2540) – De Firmian, N (2570) Reykjavik 2000]. 17...Nc6 18.Na3 Kg7 19.Nb5 Na6 20.Rc1 White was in the driver's seat, Castro Salguero, R (2396) – Rain, R (2239) ICCF email 2016.

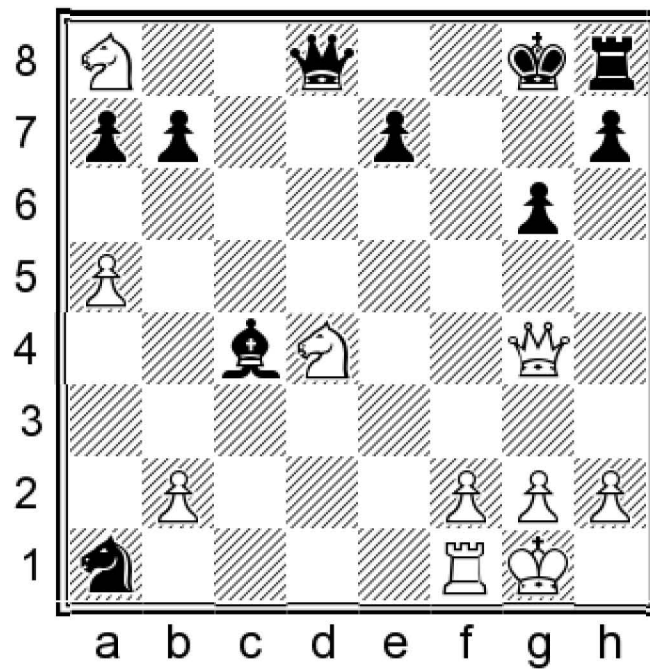
B) 16.0-0



Position after: 16.0-0

B1) 16...Nba6 17.Be3 e5 18.Na3 Bf5 19.Rc1 Benites Rivas, L (2230) – Rain, R (2240) ICCF email 2017 also ended up favorably for White.

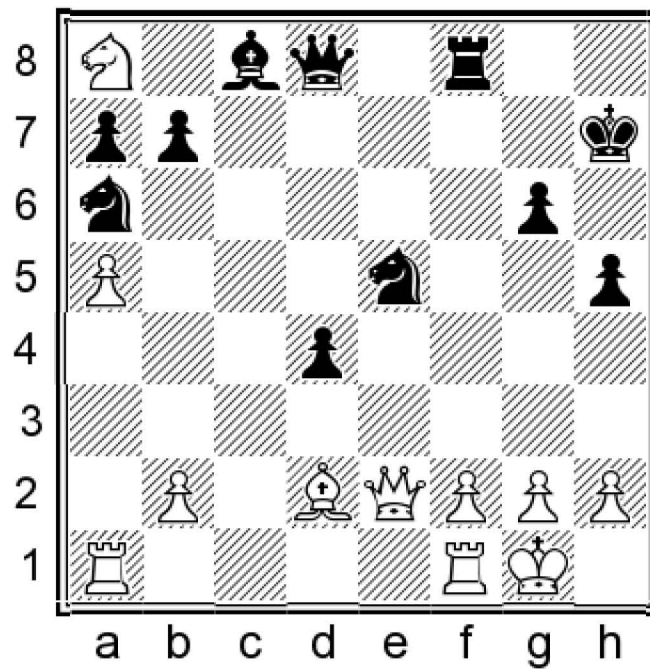
B2) 16...Nc6 17.Na3 Be6 18.Be3 Nb3 19.Bxd4 Ncxd4 20.Nb5 Bc4 21.Nxd4 Nxa1 22.Qg4!²



Position after: 22.Qg4!²

Rudenko, A – Popov, E ICCF email 2014; this cute finesse kept White on top because, as you can check, 22...Bxf1 23.Qe6+ leads to a decisive white advantage.

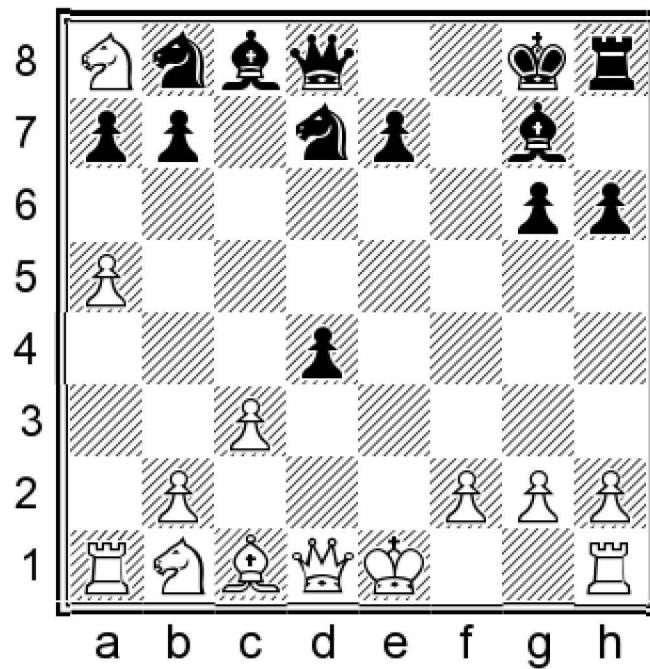
B3) 16...e5 Other tries have not turned out to be more fruitful. 17.Na3 h5 18.Be3 Kh7 19.Nb5 Nc6 20.Qc1 Na6 21.Qc4 Rf8 22.Nxd4 exd4 23.Bd2 Ne5 24.Qe2.



Position after: 24.Qe2

We have followed Fekih, B (2286) – Rain, R (2253) ICCF email 2017, where instead of 24...Qd6, 24...Rf5 might have kept the balance. The positions ensuing from 14...Nc5 are obviously very complex, but the fact that Black lost all (!) the quoted correspondence games is undoubtedly a sign that his defensive task is arduous.

Back to 14...h6.



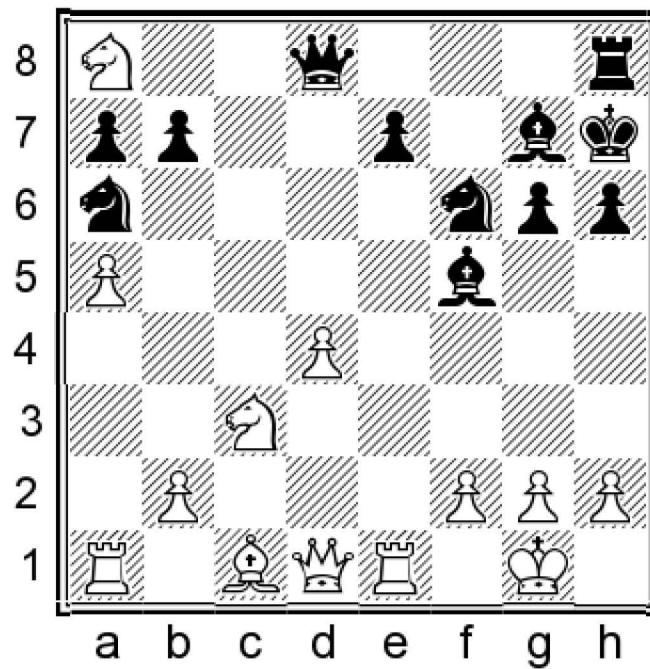
Position after: 14...h6

15.cxd4

A) 15.0-0 Kh7 should come to the same thing.

B) 15.h4?! Nc6³ White won't have any serious attack on the kingside and he has wasted a tempo on a self-weakening move.

15...Nf6 16.Nc3 Kh7 17.0-0 Bf5 18.Re1 Na6[∞]

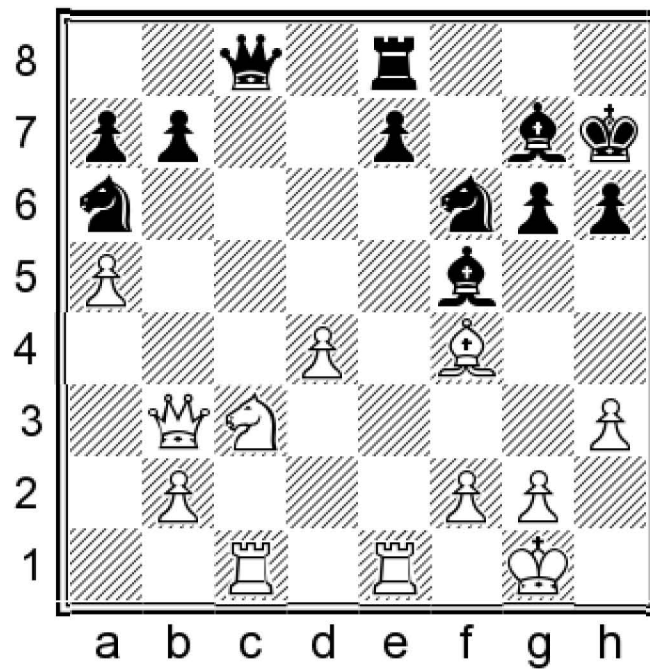


Position after: 18...Na6

This position is critical for the assessment of 16...h6. To my knowledge it has only been experimented with in a handful of correspondence games, where Black held his own.

19.Bf4

19.h3 Re8 [This move has proved adequate but the alternatives 19...Qd6 and 19...Nb4 also deserve attention.] 20.Qb3 Qxa8 21.Bf4 Qc8 22.Rac1

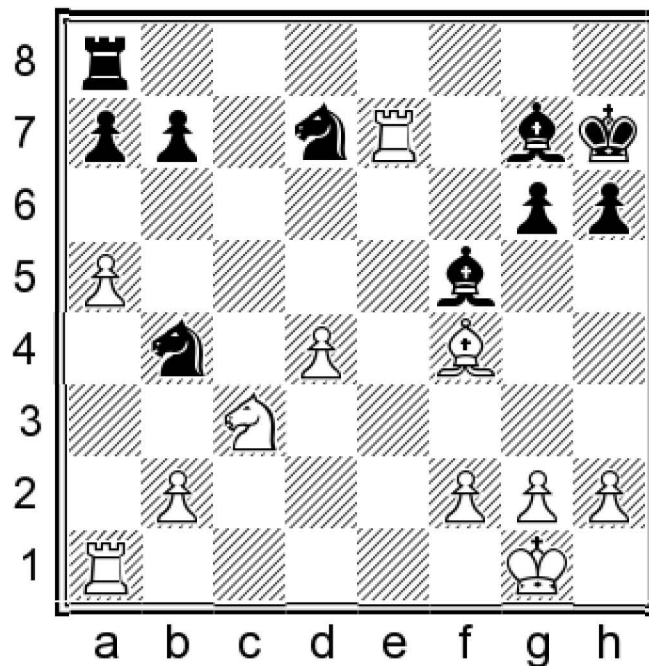


Position after: 22.Rac1

22...h5 After this radical way to stop g2-g4, seen in Sherwood, R (2308) – Grego, L (2305) ICCF 2015, the belligerents battled for only seven more moves before agreeing to a draw [22...Qd7!? and if 23.g4 then 23...g5 ∞].

19...Qd7 20.Qa4 Rxa8 21.Qxd7 Nxd7 22.Rxe7 Nb4=

Krzyzanowski, A (2306) – Pavlov, V (2385) ICCF email 2011.



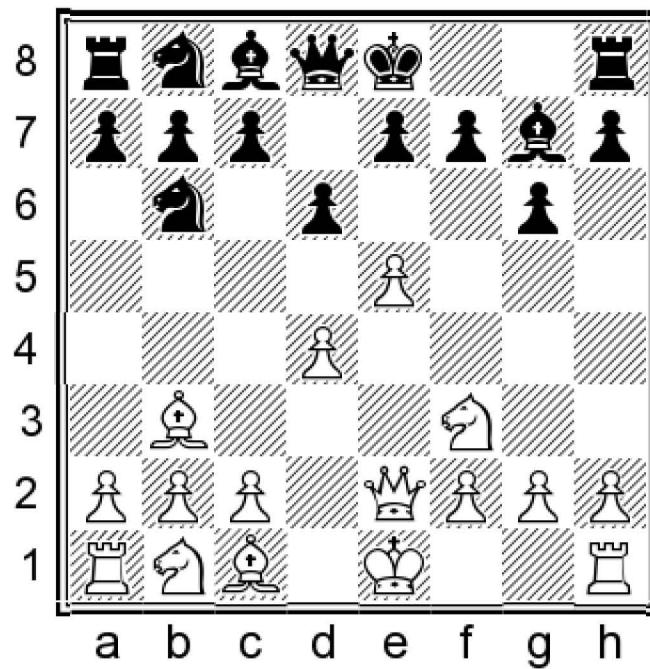
Position after: 22...Nb4=

Our cybernetic friend judges this ending as equal, a verdict confirmed by two games played after that one.

As a conclusion, I'd repeat that 8.dxe5 could prove a smart practical choice, while in the 8.Bxf7+ line the ball is in White's camp to show something convincing vs 12...Qf7 and 12...Qd8 13.Nxa8 cxd4 14.c3 h6, both being quite rare.

c) 7.Qe2 Nc6

1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.Nf3 g6 5.Bc4 Nb6 6.Bb3 Bg7 7.Qe2

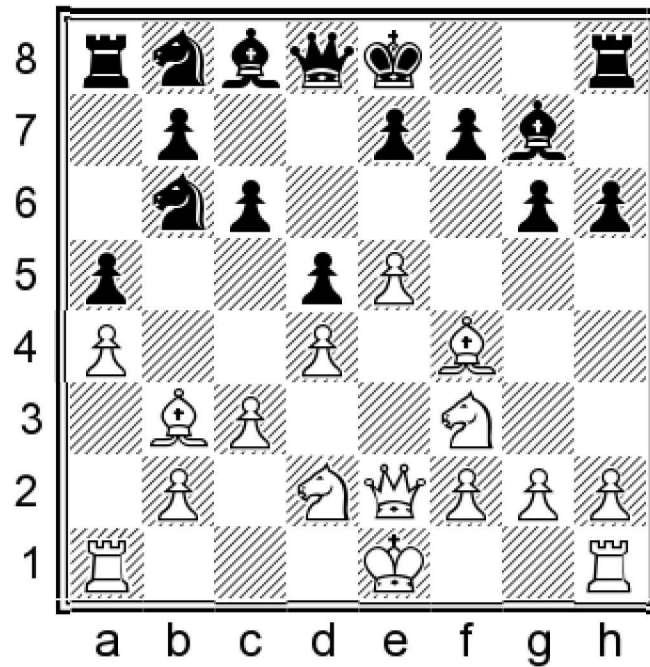


Position after: 7.Qe2

7...Nc6

Black has a poor score in correspondence games with this move, here or after 7...0-0 (next subchapter), whereas he is doing OK when he throws in ...c7-c5 before developing his knight.

7...d5 8.Bf4 White obviously disposes of a wide range of sensible options here and, given the closed character of the game, postponing short castling is one of them. 8...c6 9.Nbd2 h6 10.c3 a5 11.a4²

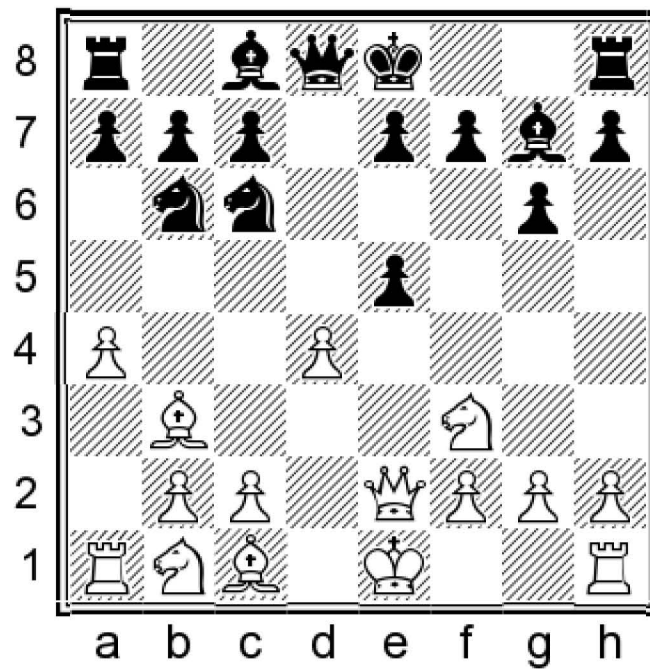


Position after: 11.a4²

Naiditsch, A (2681) – Wang Chen (2476) Changsha 2019. Here we see a typical scenario when Black goes for ...d6-d5, where White enjoys a pleasant plus thanks to his space advantage.

8.0-0

On 8.a4 the easiest way to deal with the idea of a4-a5 is, as usual, to block the enemy pawn, which we examine in another section. Otherwise, Black may try 8...dxe5.

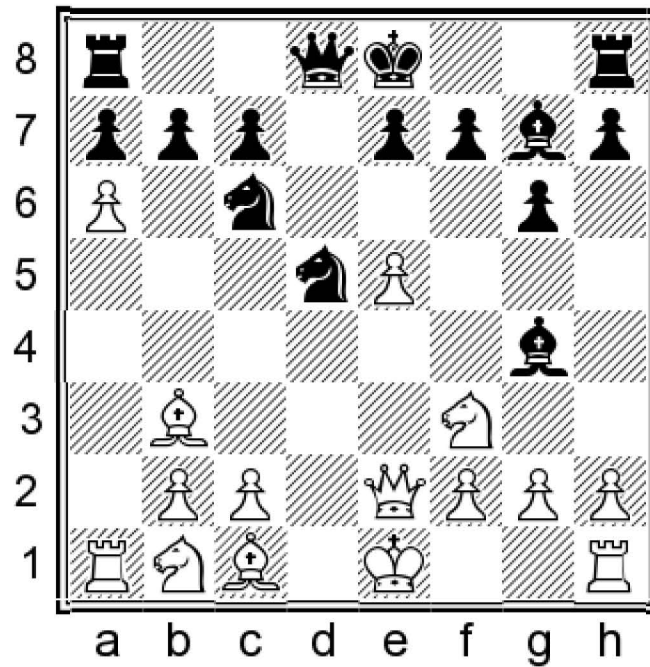


Position after: 8...dxe5

A) 9.a5

A1) 9...Nd7?! 10.Bxf7+! Kxf7 11.Ng5+ Ke8 12.Qc4² This is not as bad as it looks for Black, but definitely in White's favor, as pointed out by C&K [not 12.Ne6?? Nxd4-+].

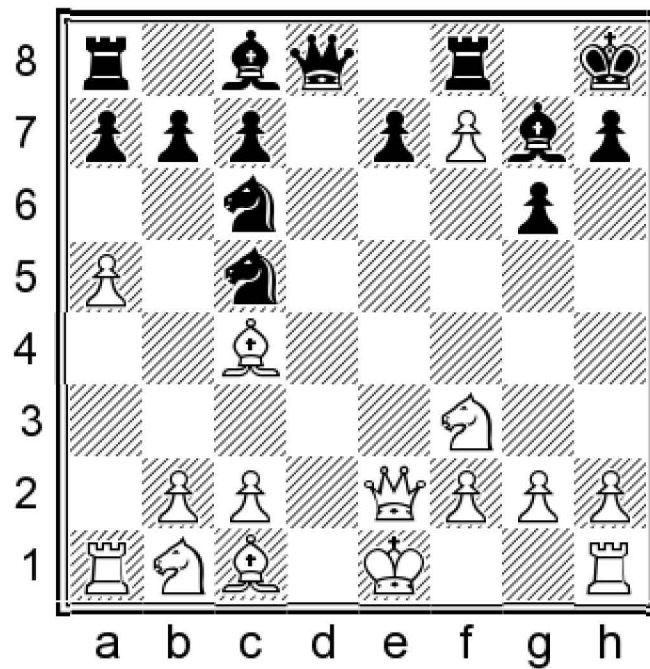
A2) 9...Nd5! 10.dxe5 Bg4 11.a6



Position after: 11.a6

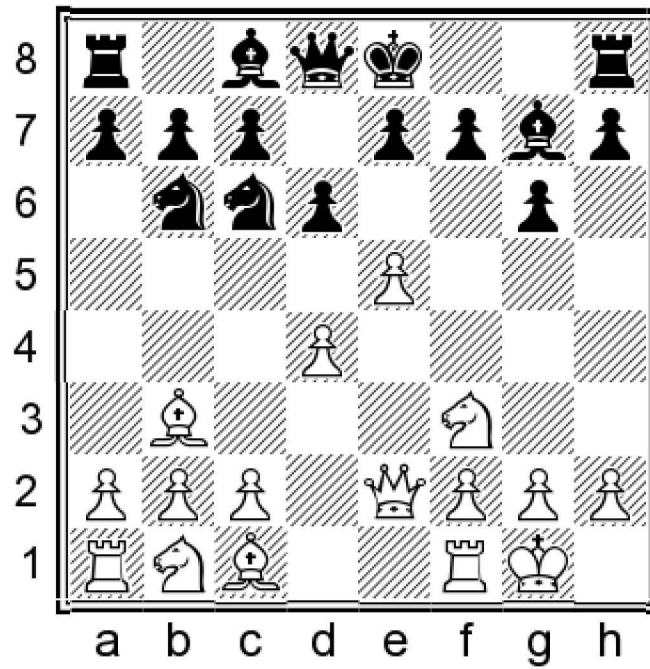
Now Black should opt for the unclear 11...Nxe5 ∞ , avoiding C&K's main line 11...Bxf3? 12.Qxf3 Nd4 13.Qxd5 Qxd5 14.Bxd5 Nxc2+ 15.Ke2 Nxa1 16.axb7 when White emerges on top.

B) 9.dxe5 0-0 10.a5 Nd7 11.e6 Nc5 12.exf7+ Kh8 13.Bc4²



Position after: 13.Bc4²

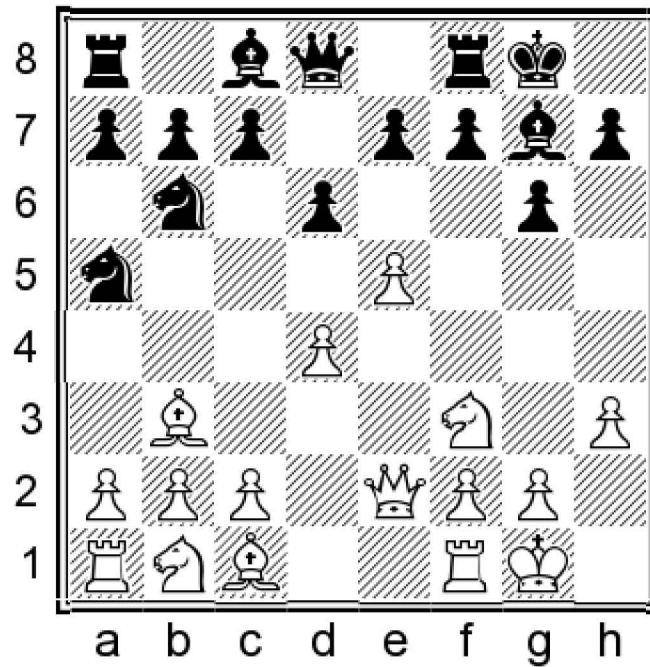
Morozov, D (2376) – Rain, R (2253) ICCF email 2014. Black's risky strategy has a justification based on his big lead in development and now, rather than the game continuation, 13...Bg4 would definitely make sense. White remains better though.



Position after: 8.0-0

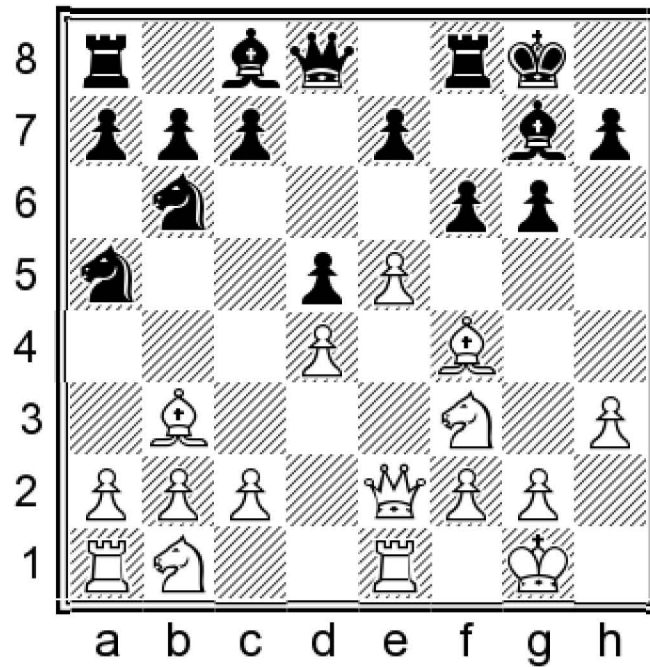
8...dxe5

I prefer this way of handling the position rather than 8...0-0 9.h3 Na5, which has proven a bit difficult to play [9...a5 10.a4 transposes to another section]. Let's see possible continuations.



Position after: 9...Na5

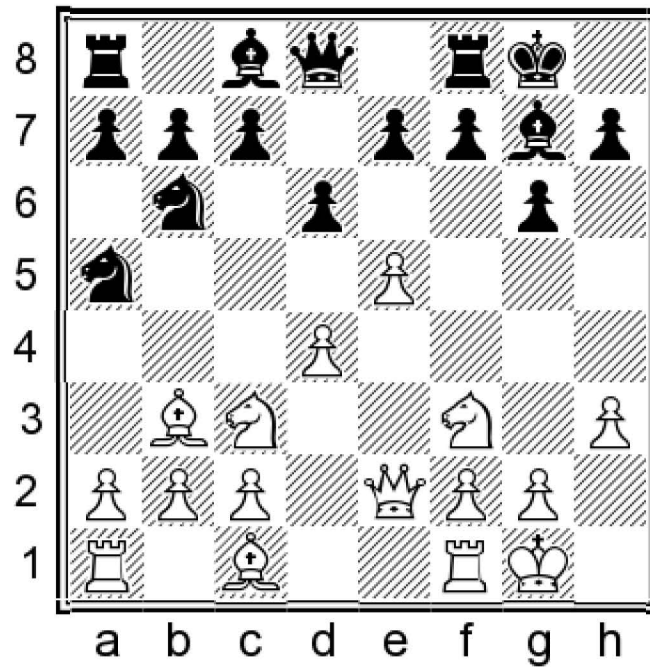
A) 10.Re1 d5 [10...dxe5 11.dxe5 c5 is perhaps a smarter idea, as in the main line of 7.Qe2.] 11.Bf4 [Or 11.c3, in order to immediately clarify the fate of the light-squared bishop 11...Nxb3 12.axb3² Soederberg, K (2286) – Rain, R (2372) ICCF email 2010.] 11...f6?!



Position after: 11...f6?!

A risky undermining strategy, in view of the possibility of 12.e6!?, but Black probably wanted to get some activity. 12.Nbd2 g5 13.Bg3 h6 [Perhaps 13...Bf5 improves a bit but White remains in the driver's seat.] 14.exf6 exf6 Dragu, I (2312) – Rain, R (2372) ICCF email 2010. Now White stood clearly better after 15.Qd3.

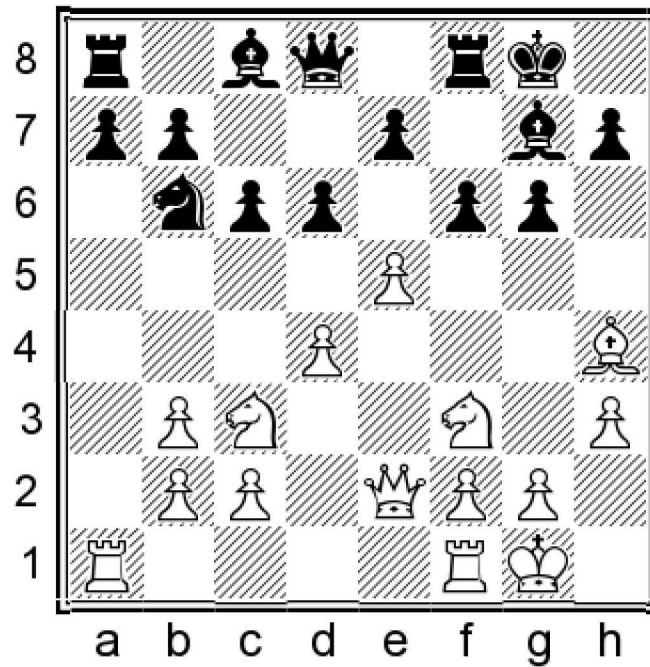
B) 10.Nc3 is White's most frequent choice here, though he should extract a small opening edge with any other sensible move, given his space advantage.



Position after: 10.Nc3

B1) 10...c6 has revealed itself to be a reliable alternative to 10...Nxb3, after which White has a bunch of worthy options. Some examples follow.

B1.1) 11.Bg5?! provoking ...f7-f6 is merely helping Black activate his dark-squared bishop, in my opinion. He now gets an improved version of the 10...Nxb3 11.axb3 c6 12.Bf4 variation. 11...Nxb3 12.axb3 [The intermediate move 12.exd6? is a mistake due to 12...Nxd4! 13.Nxd4 Qxd6 and Black is clearly better.] 12...f6 13.Bh4

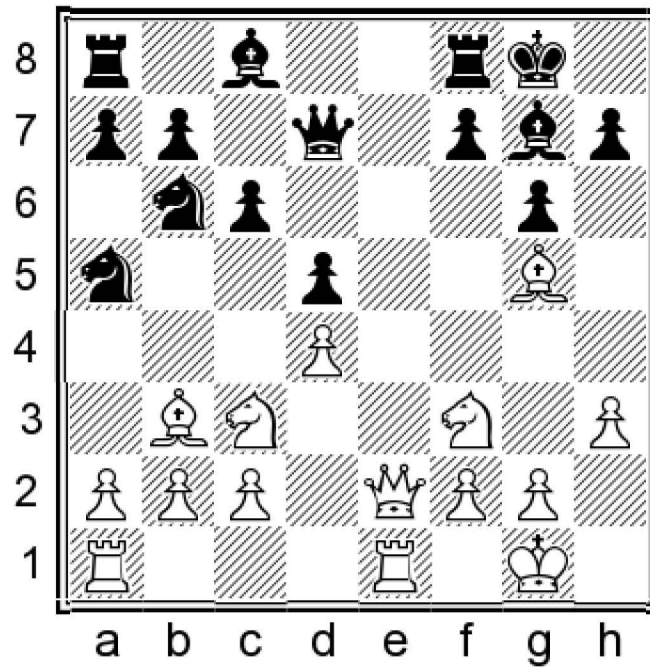


Position after: 13.Bh4

This was Ponkratov, P (2631) – Ter Sahakyan, S (2640) lichess.org 2020 where rather than the strange 13...Qd7?! Black could have gained decent counterplay by means of 13...g5 14.Bg3 g4 15.hxg4 fxe5 16.dxe5 Bxg4,,.

B1.2) 11.Re1 d5 and now 12.Bf4 Schuller, J (2381) – Rain, R (2253) ICCF email 2014 transposes into 10.Re1 [while 12.Nd1, employed in Pfaff, H (2421) – Rain, R (2278) ICCF email 2014, frees the way for the c-pawn and prepares Ne3-g4].

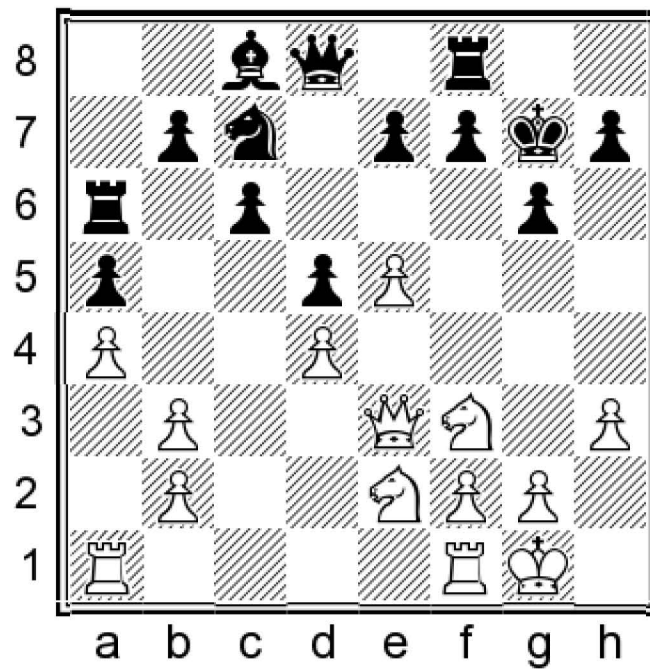
B1.3) 11.exd6 exd6 12.Bg5 Had Black opted for 10...Nxb3 (B3 variation), this move could have been answered by ...f7-f6. 12...Qd7 13.Rfe1 d5



Position after: 13...d5

Krueger, H (2424) – Rain, R (2372) ICCF email 2010. The light-squared bishop is out of play on b3, but so is the knight at a5. A trade of those pieces, perhaps preceded by ...Nbc4, is likely. Black seems about OK to me.

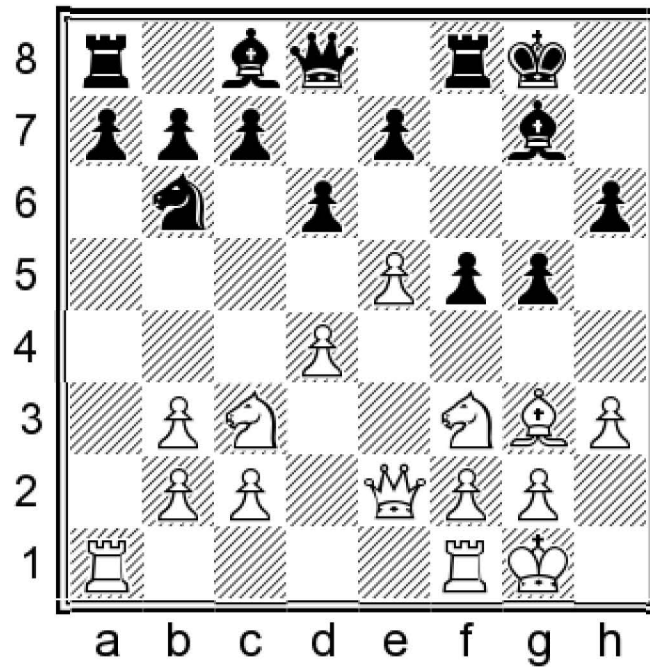
B1.4) 11.Bf4 d5 12.a4 Nxb3 13.cxb3 a5 14.Qe3 Ra6 15.Bh6 Na8
16.Bxg7 Kxg7 17.Ne2 Nc7



Position after: 17...Nc7

The correspondence encounter Kovac, S – Rain, R 2010 was perhaps a trifle better for White, but no more than that.

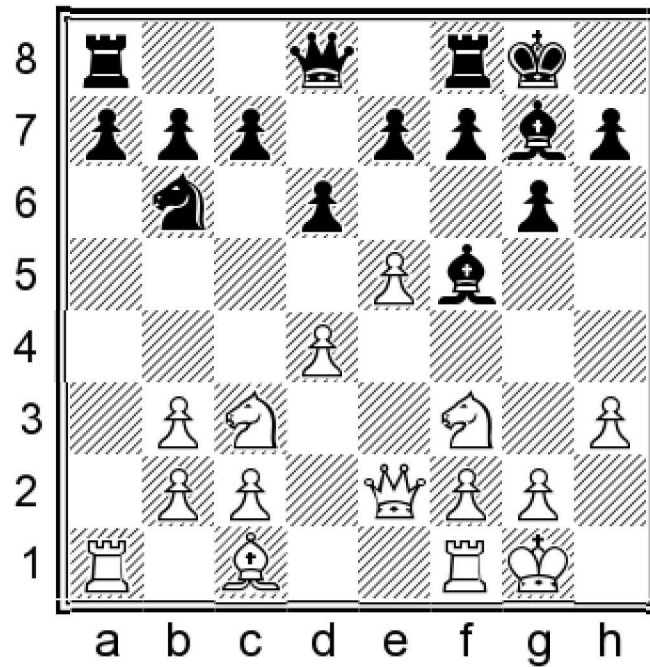
B2) 10...h6!? 11.Bf4?! This move is playing into Black's hands, justifying his prophylactic 10th move [11.Ne4! was stronger]. 11...g5 12.Bg3 Nxb3 13.axb3 f5



Position after: 13...f5

Rasmussen, E (2344) – Popov, E (2275) ICCF email 2013. Objectively the position may still be balanced, but I definitely like Black's kingside prospects.

B3) 10...Nxb3 Not yet forced, but it cuts off some of White's options. If there is no imperative need for 10...d5 I'd prefer to postpone it in order to keep some flexibility. 11.axb3 Bf5 [11...c6 12.Bf4 h6 13.Rfe1 g5 We are following Parsons, L (2419) – Rain, R (2253) ICCF email 2017. The coming sequence of moves is by no means forced, but seems sensible from both sides: 14.Bh2 Bf5 15.Ne4 Re8 16.Qd2 Nc8 17.h4 g4 18.Bf4 h5 19.Ng3 Bg6 20.Nh2 with mutual chances.]

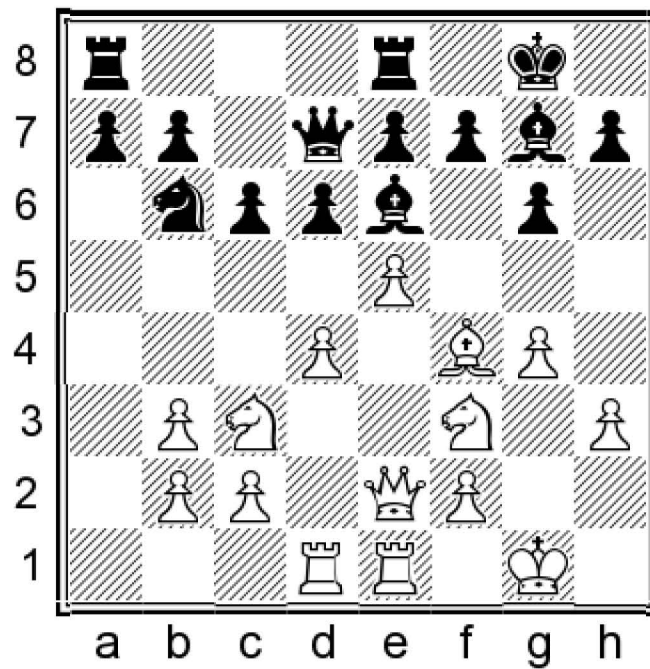


Position after: 11...Bf5

B3.1) 12.Re1 a5 Not quite sure why this push is needed! 13.Bf4 c6 14.g4 Bc8 15.Qe3 dxe5 16.dxe5 Nd5 17.Nxd5 cxd5 18.Nd4 White was in control in Hameister, R (2407) – Rain, R (2251) ICCF email 2015, the weakening of his kingside being for the time being irrelevant.

B3.2) 12.Ne4 a5 13.Bd2 dxe5 14.dxe5 a4= Leemans, R (2362) – Peschke, I (2278) ICCF email 2013.

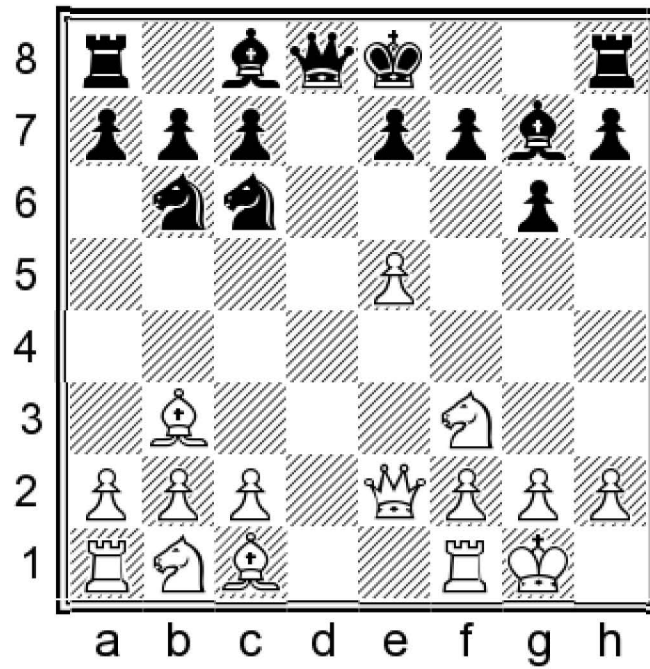
B3.3) 12.Bf4 Qd7 13.Rad1 c6 14.Rfe1 Rfe8 15.g4 Be6



Position after: 15...Be6

All this occurred in Brkic, A (2593) – Yuffa, D (2594) lichess.org 2020, where Black could have met 16.Qe3?! with either 16...h5 or 16...f6, reaching approximate equality. Better, however, were 16.Ng5 or 16.Ne4, when the computer is a bit more optimistic about White's chances.

9.dxe5

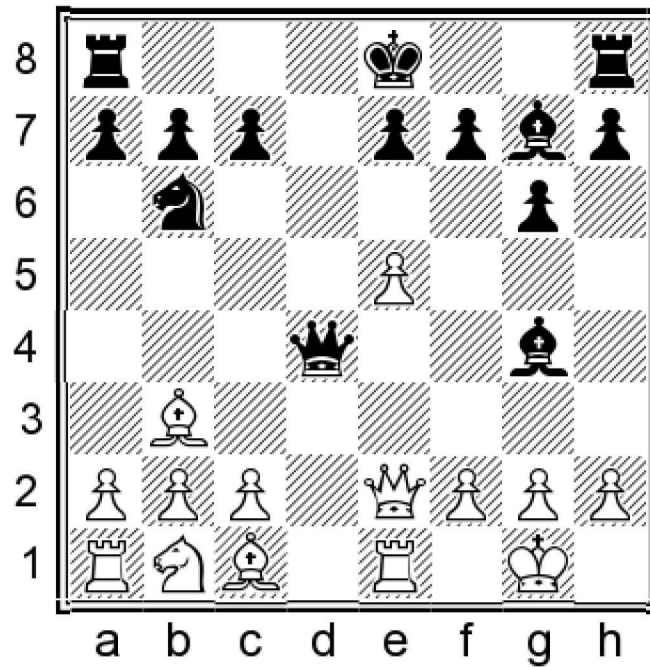


Position after: 9.dxe5

9...Nd4 10.Nxd4 Qxd4 11.Re1

11.e6 Bxe6 12.Bxe6 fxe6= Spasov, V – Sarwinski, M Warsaw 1989. Black has enough dynamism to compensate for his inferior pawn structure.

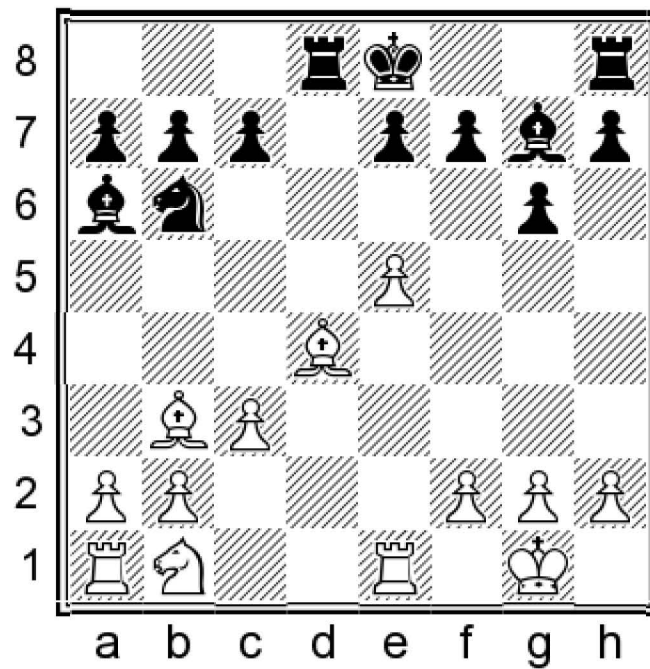
11...Bg4



Position after: 11...Bg4

12.Qf1

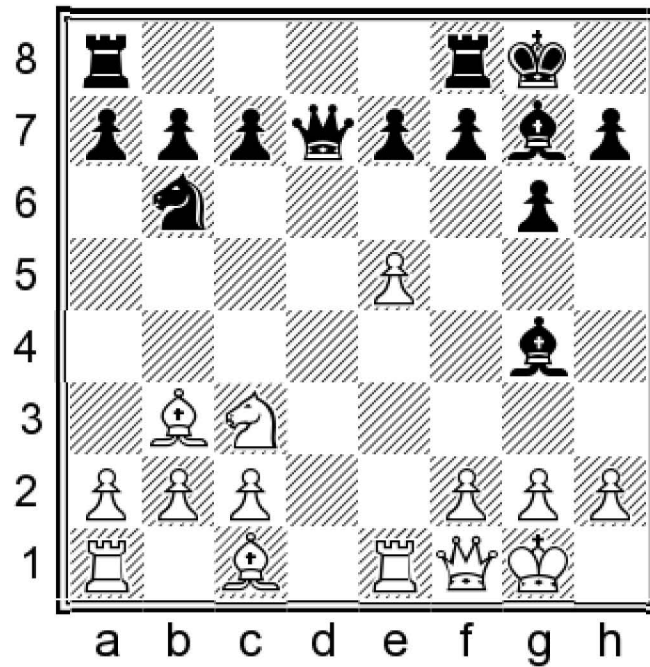
In the event of 12.Be3 C&K's solution of 12...Bxe2 13.Bxd4 Rd8 is appropriate in my opinion. [13...0-0-0?! is on the other hand inaccurate in view of 14.Rxe2 Rxd4 15.Nc3², when Black faces the dual threats of Bxf7 and Nb5xa7]. 14.c3 Ba6



Position after: 14...Ba6

15.Nd2 [This looks a bit more testing than 15.Na3 e6 where Black is possibly intending ...Bf8 followed by ...c7-c5, which should bring him close to equality.] 15...0-0 [15...c5 16.Be3²] 16.Ne4 Now with either 16...Nc4 17.Nc5 Nxb2 or 16...Bb5 17.Nc5 Bc6 Black should gradually erase his opponent's slight pull.

12...0-0 13.Nc3 Qd7



Position after: 13...Qd7

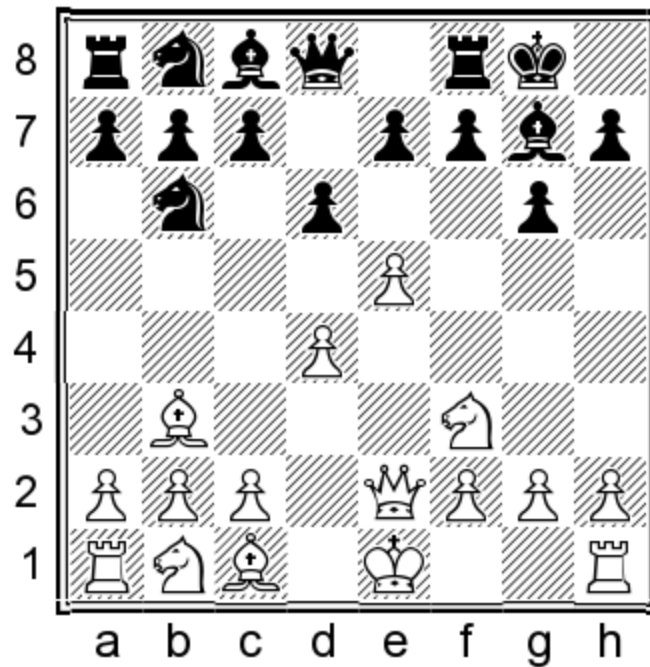
This position was reached four times according to my database.

14.Bg5

This bishop move, from Wei, Y – Bortnyk, M Kigali 2013, is apparently more challenging than the other (and, curiously, later) attempts, 14.Bf4 and 14.a4. With careful play Black should be able to equalize fully step by step.

d) 7.Qe2 0-0

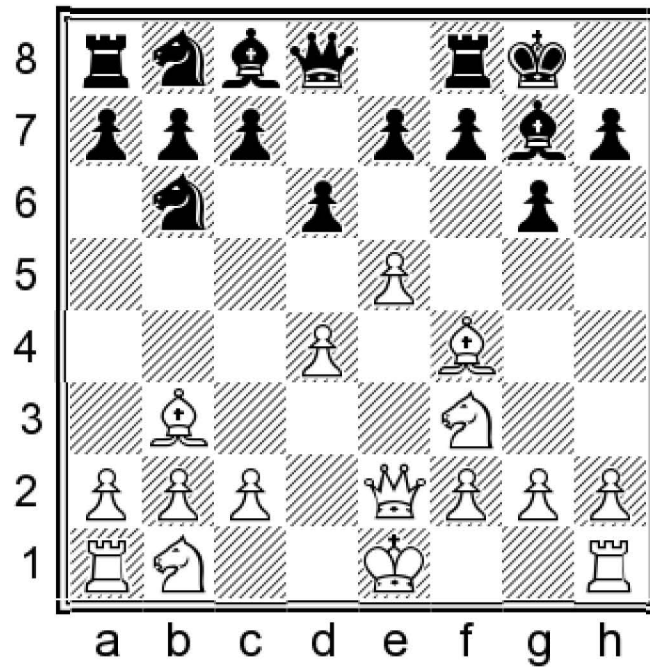
1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.Nf3 g6 5.Bc4 Nb6 6.Bb3 Bg7 7.Qe2 0-0



Position after: 7...0-0

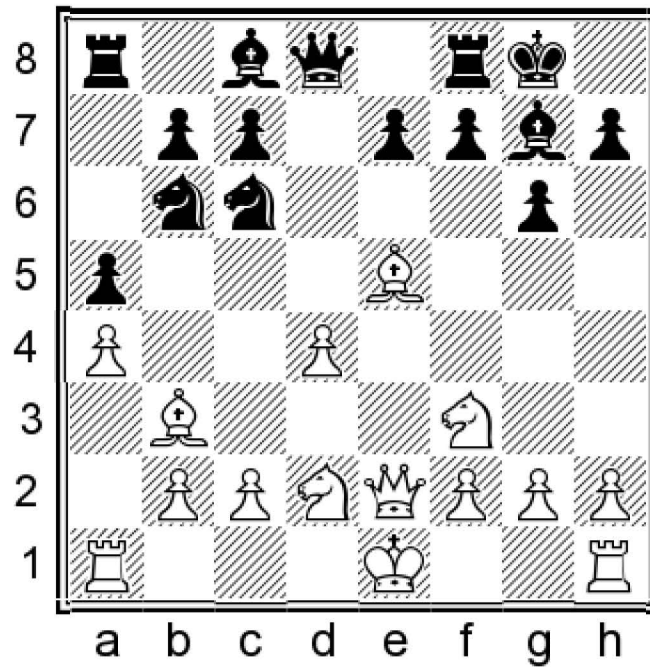
8.h3

A) The rare guest 8.Bf4 is neither bad nor particularly challenging for Black.



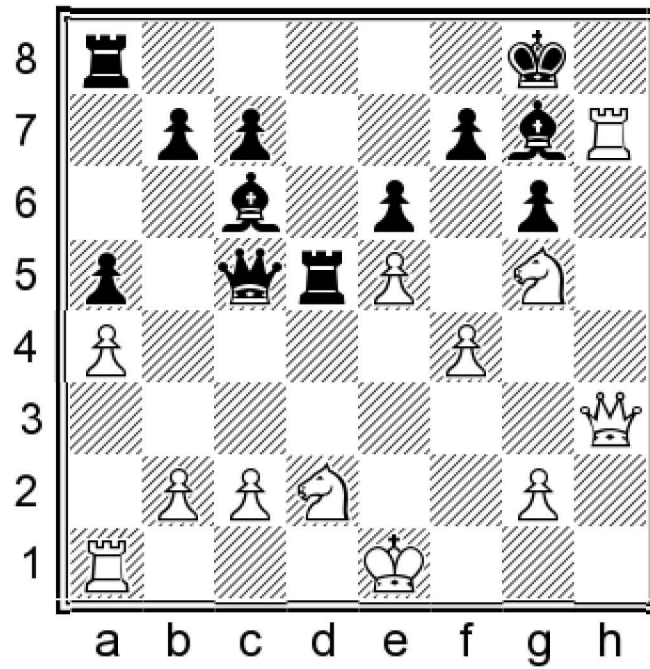
Position after: 8.Bf4

A1) 8...a5 9.a4 Nc6 10.Nbd2 dxe5 11.Bxe5 This uncommon recapture happened in Gurgidze, B (2490) – Yermolinsky, A (2455) Tskhaltubo 1981. I will reproduce this whole entertaining game.



Position after: 11.Bxe5

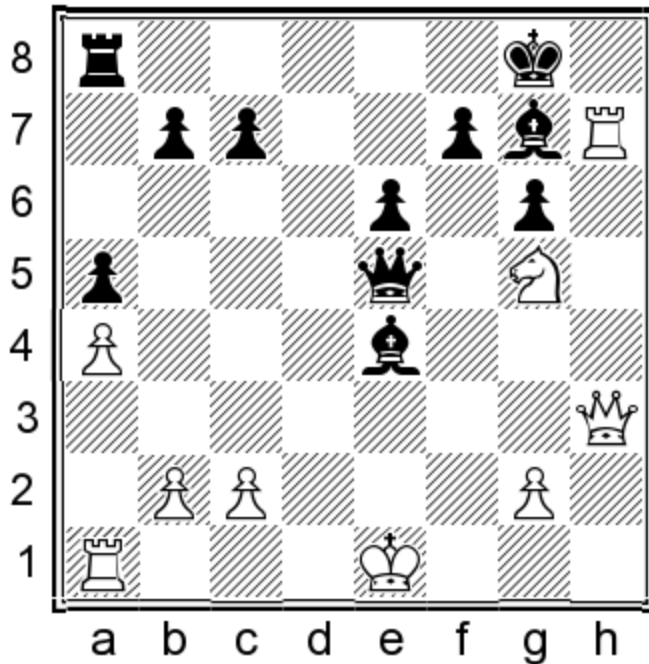
11...Nxe5 12.dxe5 e6 13.h4 Bd7 14.h5 Bc6 15.hxg6 hxg6 Black may have been confident that with his opponent's dark-squared bishop vanished his king was pretty safe, but things aren't that simple. 16.Qe3 Qe7 17.Ng5 Rfd8 [According to the engine Black could have afforded 17...Bxg2!? 18.Rh7 Bd5.] 18.f4 Nd5 19.Bxd5 Rxd5 20.Rh7 Qc5 21.Qh3



Position after: 21.Qh3

21...Rxe5+?? [21...Qg1+ 22.Nf1 Be8 23.Ke2 would have kept the outcome unclear.] 22.fxe5 Qxe5+ 23.Nde4 Be8 [“Yermo” had probably

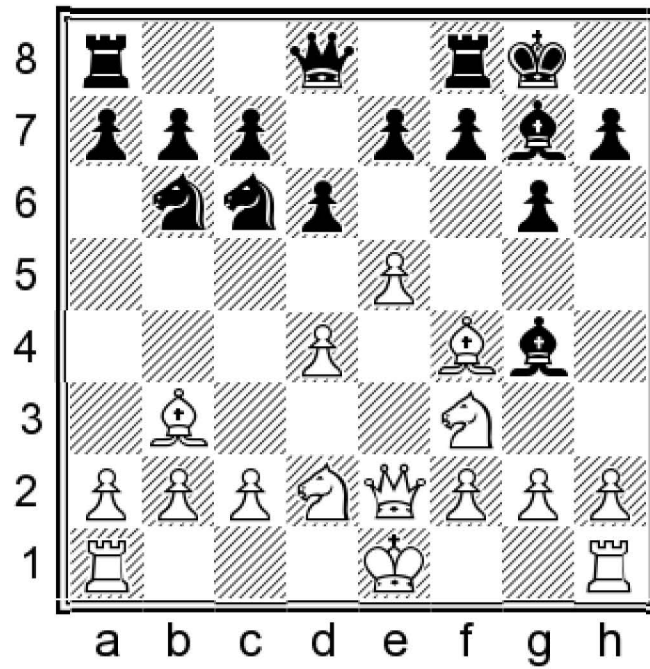
missed in his earlier calculations that 23...Bxe4? would be punished by



Position after: 23...Bxe4?

24.Rh8+ Bxh8 25.Qh7+ Kf8 26.Qxf7#] 24.Rxg7+ Kxg7 25.0-0-0 Black resigned.

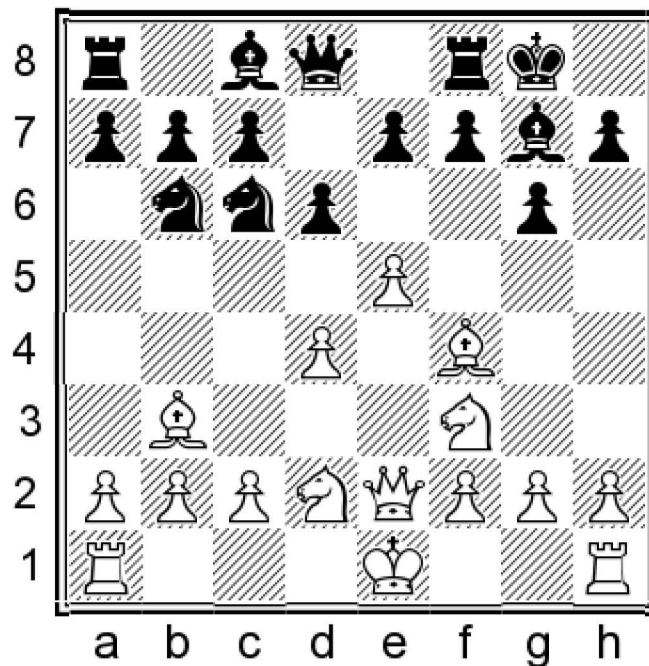
A2) 8...Bg4?! seems a bit less suitable even though Black also puts indirect pressure on his rival's center this way. 9.Nbd2 Nc6



Position after: 9...Nc6

This was Karklins, A (2340) – Saleh, M (2200) North Bay 1995, where rather than 10.Qe3?!, 10.c3! would have been a bit better for White.

A3) 8...Nc6 9.Nbd2



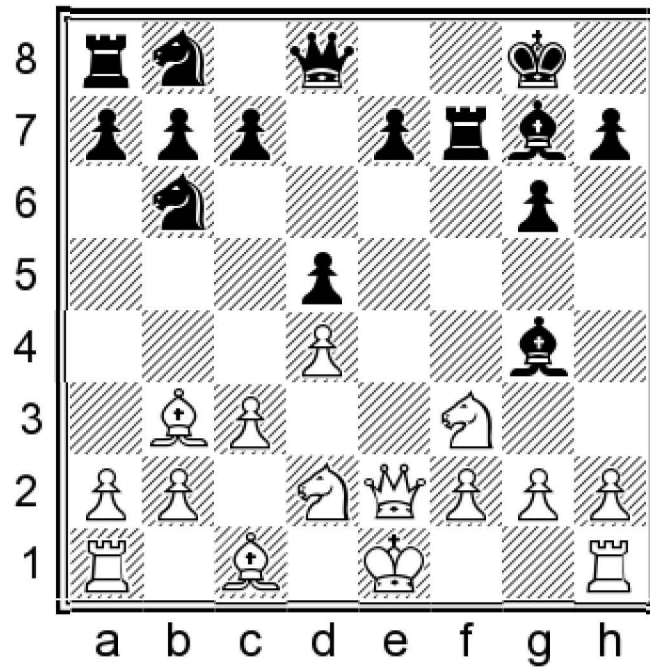
Position after: 9.Nbd2

A3.1) 9...a5 10.a4 This transposes into 8...a5. Here we see a recurring pattern of the 5.Bc4 line: most of the time if one side pushes his a-pawn two squares forward the easiest for the other side is to copy his opponent, the whole operation being often “neutral”.

A3.2) 9...Na5!? represents another way to handle the position: 10.0-0 Nxb3 11.axb3 Nd5 12.Bg3 a5 Petenyi, T (2251) – Szeko, L (2124) Slovakia 2009. In the long run Black’s prospects could be brighter, thanks to his bishop pair, but for the moment the game remains about equal.

A3.3) 9...dxe5 10.Bxe5 Nxe5 11.dxe5 Nd5 Pedersen, K – Skovgaard, I Grenaa 1973. White’s more fluid game compensates for the enemy bishops [11...a5!?].

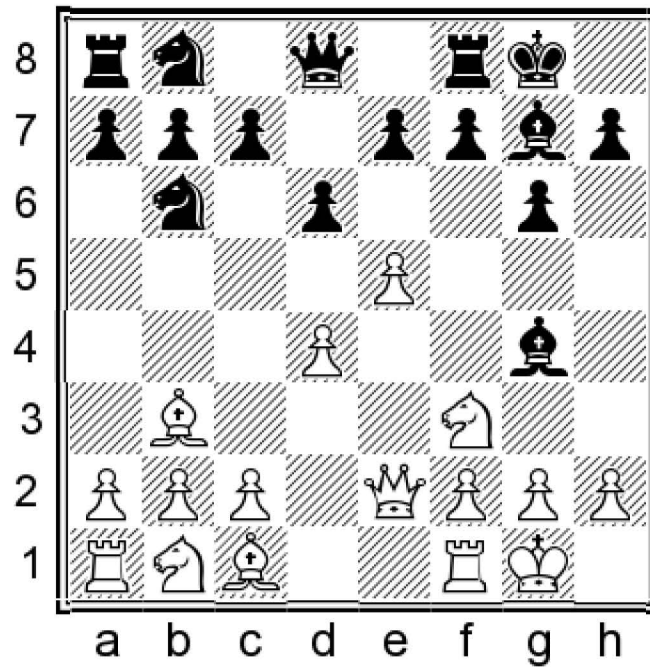
B) 8.c3 is also not a move you’ll face every day. 8...Bg4 [8...Nc6?! is less suitable in view of 9.e6! Bxe6 10.Bxe6 fxe6 11.Qxe6+ Kh8 12.Ng5 with a slight edge to White.] 9.e6 d5 10.exf7+ Rxf7 11.Nbd2



Position after: 11.Nbd2

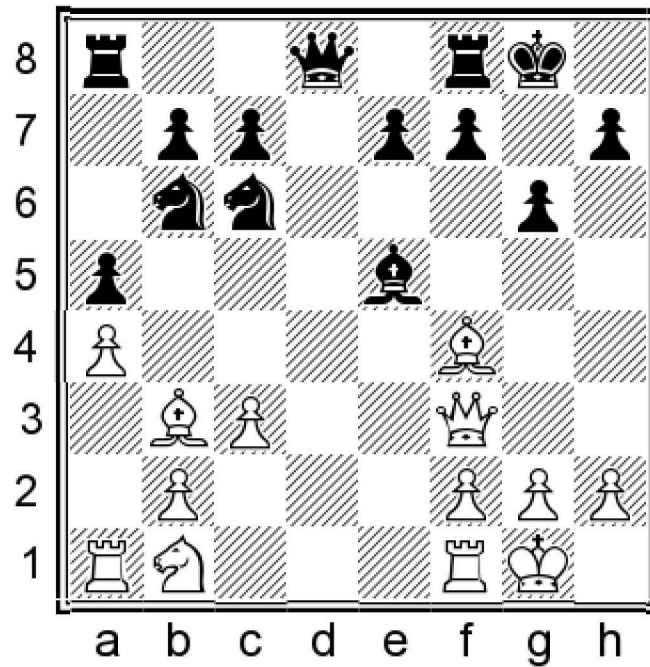
11...e5! The best reply. [Instead 11...Nc6?! 12.h3 Bxf3 13.Nxf3 e5 14.dxe5 Nxe5 15.Nxe5 Bxe5 McPhillips, J (2399) – To, N (2348) Budapest 2018 proved a bit better for White even if he couldn't preserve his two bishops.] 12.dxe5 Re7 13.0-0 Rxe5 14.Qd1 Re8= Black sidesteps the threat of h2-h3, which would have won the bishop pair, as now Black could retreat his bishop to f5.

C) 8.0-0 Bg4



Position after: 8...Bg4

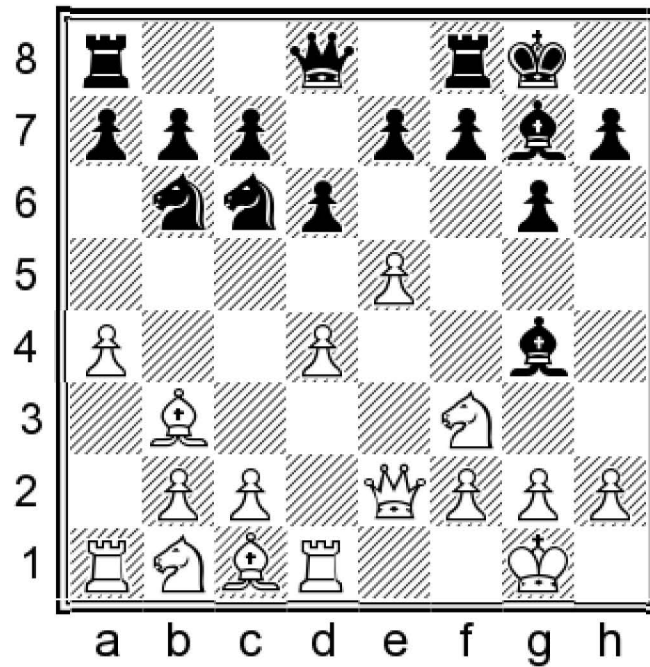
C1) 9.c3 Nc6 10.Bf4 We are following Zhang, Z (2639) – Vescovi, G (2619) Taiyuan 2006. [10.e6?! is faulty: 10...d5 11.exf7+ Rxf7 12.Nbd2 e5f Ghaem, M – Vaganian, R Tripoli 2004.] 10...a5 11.a4 dxe5 12.dxe5 Bxf3 13.Qxf3 Bxe5



Position after: 13...Bxe5

14.Bxe5?! [Interestingly, the machine criticizes this natural choice and prefers 14.Rd1©.] 14...Nxe5 15.Qxb7 c6 16.Rd1 At this stage rather than 16...Nbd7?! Black could have gained the upper hand thanks to some cute tactics: 16...Nd5! 17.Bxd5 Rb8 18.Qa7 cxd5³; instead 18.Bxf7+? would be bad because of 18...Kxf7 19.Rxd8 Rfxd8! 20.Qa6 Rd1+ 21.Qf1 Rxf1+ 22.Kxf1 Rxb2μ.

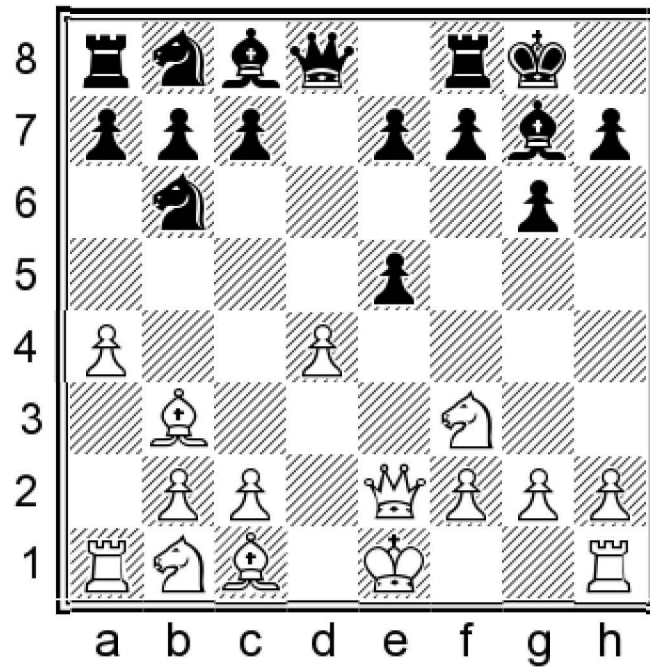
C2) 9.a4 Nc6 10.Rd1



Position after: 10.Rd1

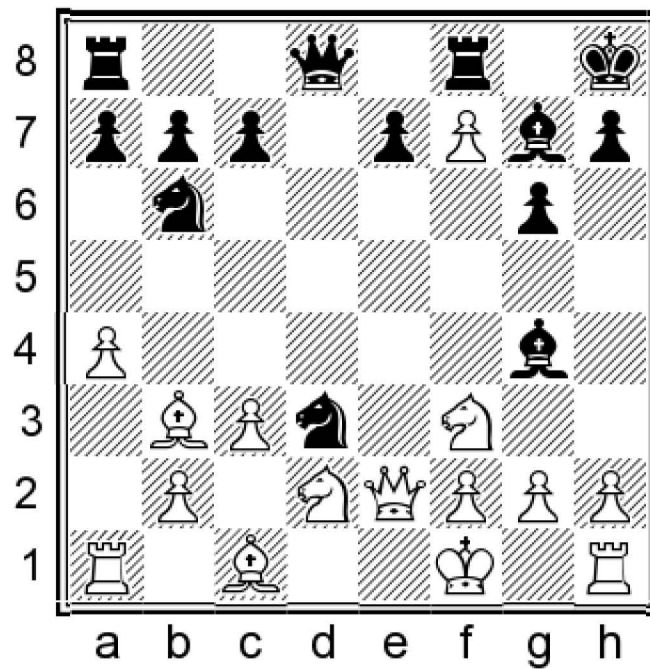
We are following Mammadova, G (2324) – Barsov, A (2521) Baku 2012, which continued 10...e6 [Black could have tried 10...Bxf3, intending 11.gxf3 e6 or 11.Qxf3 dxe5 12.dxe5 Nd4] 11.a5 Nd5=.

D) 8.a4 dxe5



Position after: 8...dxe5

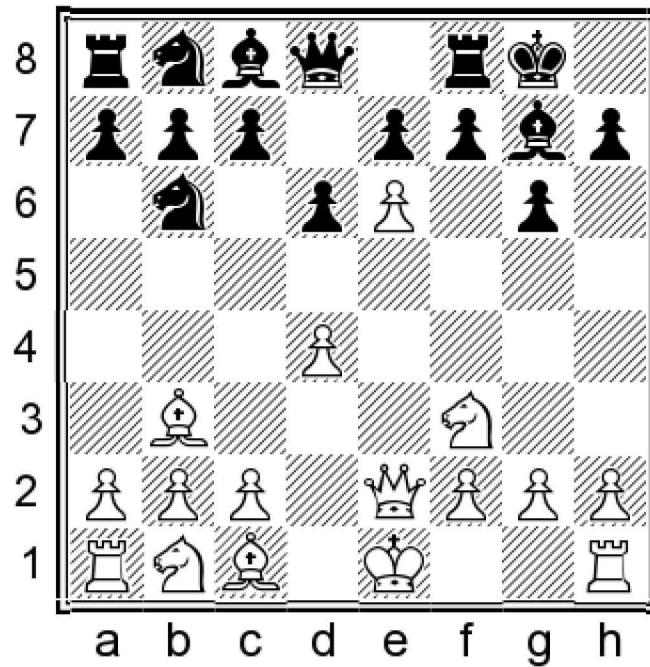
9.dxe5 [9.a5 doesn't trouble Black at all: 9...N6d7 10.dxe5 Nc5= followed by either ...Nc6 or ...Bg4 if White moves his bishop.] 9...Bg4 10.e6 Nc6 [10...f5!?] 11.exf7+ Kh8 12.c3 Ne5 13.Nbd2 Nd3+ 14.Kf1



Position after: 14.Kf1

Obviously the pawn at f7 won't survive for long, and having lost the right to castle is an issue for White. The position is about level after any of the following moves: 14...c6, 14...e6, 14...Bf5 Petrov, M (2441) – Schmidt, L (2398) ICCF email 2017 or 14...Qd7 Lyukmanov, V (2402) – Popov, E (2291) ICCF email 2014.

E) In the event of 8.e6



Position after: 8.e6

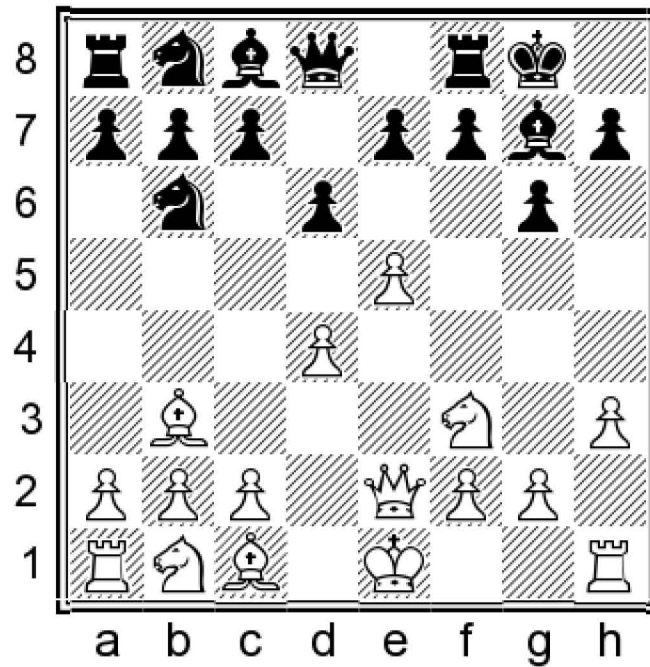
Black can counter his opponent's offensive by the common 8...d5!.

[8...Bxe6?! played in Pourramezanali, A (2519) – Fier, A (2551) Toshkent 2019 is a cute idea involving an exchange sacrifice. Alas, his huge lead in development doesn't seem to give Black quite enough following 9.Bxe6 fxe6 10.Qxe6+ Kh8 11.Ng5 Qd7 12.Nf7+ Rxf7 13.Qxf7 Nc6 14.c3².]

9.Ng5 Bxe6 10.Nxe6 fxe6 11.Qxe6+ Kh8 12.c3 Qd7 13.Qe2.



This was Vokhidov, S (2494) – Idani, P (2604) Sharjah 2019, which continued 13...Nc6?! 14.f4 g5 15.0-0 gxf4 16.Bxf4 e5 17.dxe5 Nxe5 18.Nd2 with a slight plus to White, who couldn't simply win a piece because of 18.Bxe5? Rxf1+ 19.Kxf1 Qf5+. Instead of his 13th move, Black should probably have preferred 13...Qd6, intending 14.f4 c5! or 14.0-0 e5, with approximate equality.

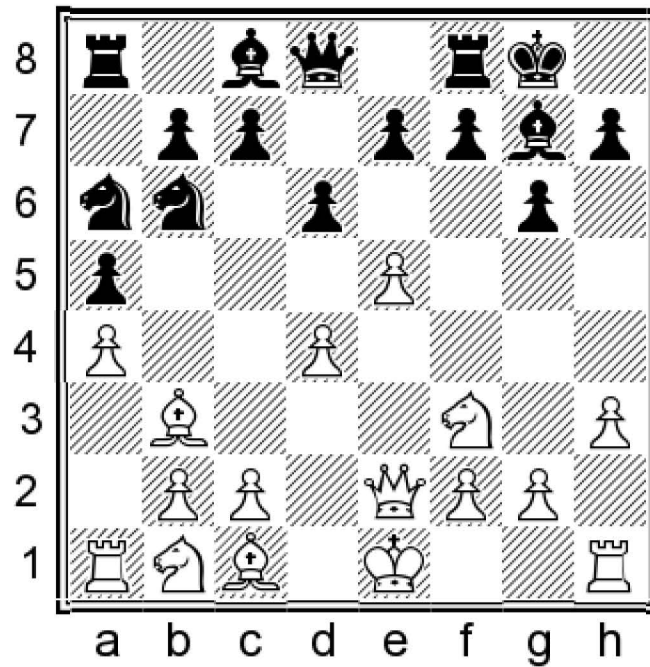


Position after: 8.h3

8...c5

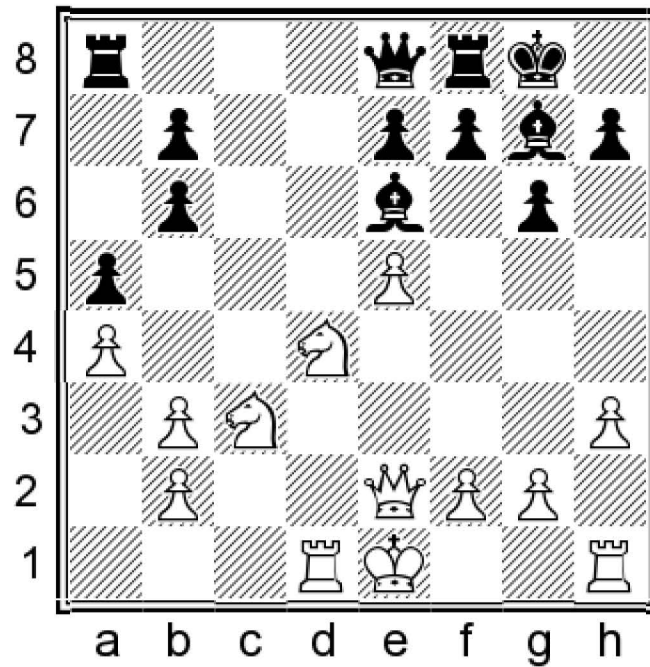
A fresh attempt to solve Black's opening problems. Indeed, except for one game played in 1985, all the others featuring this push took place after 2012.

A) By opting for 8...a5!? 9.a4 Na6



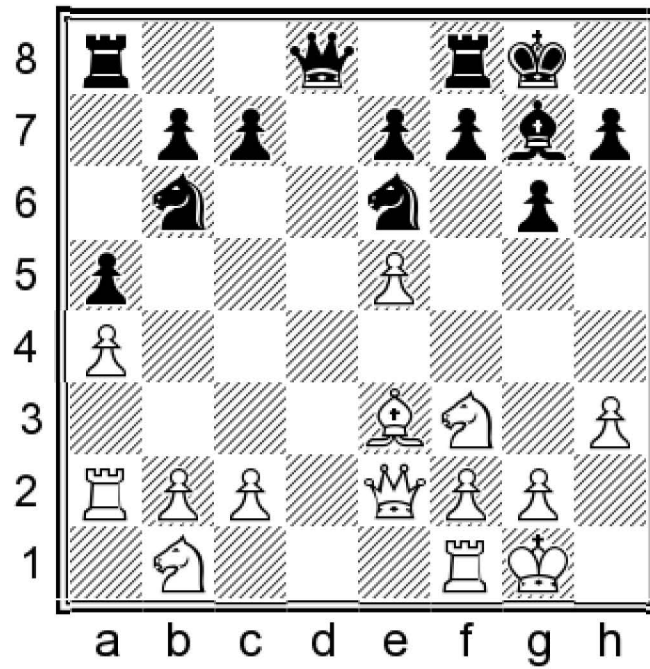
Position after: 9...Na6

Black makes it clear that he wants to trade on e5 and then go for the bishop on b3. White may keep a small plus there but this is certainly playable for the second player. For instance 10.0-0 [10.Nc3 dxe5 11.dxe5 Nc5 12.Be3 Nxb3 13.Rd1 Qe8 14.Bxb6 cxb6 15.cxb3 Be6 16.Nd4



Position after: 16.Nd4

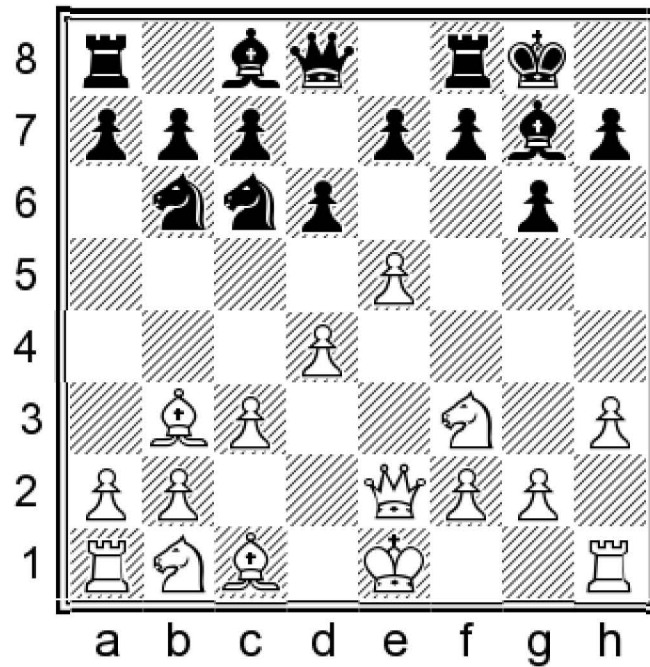
Mueller, D (2337) – Byrne, M (2276) ICCF email 2018. White is a bit better according to the machine, though Black drew that particular game.] 10...dxe5 11.dxe5 Nc5 12.Ba2 [12.Rd1 Qe8 13.Be3 this may transpose into 10.Nc3, while grabbing the a4-pawn is unclear; I invite you to check for yourselves!] 12...Be6 13.Be3 Bxa2 14.Rxa2 Ne6.



Position after: 14...Ne6

Black was close to equality in Pivinsky, E (2493) – Pavlov, V (2415) ICCF email 2018.

B) 8...Nc6 9.c3?! [The main line 9.0-0! transposes into 8.0-0 Nc6 9.h3.]



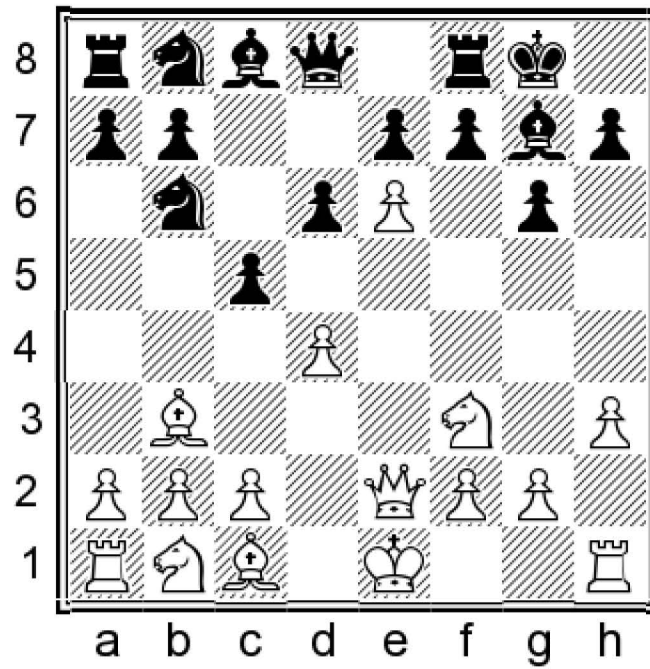
Position after: 9.c3?!

B1) 9...Bf5 10.e6 d5 11.exf7+ Rxf7 12.Bg5?! Qd6 [12...Qf8!?] 13.0-0 e5
Bulmaga, I (2440) – Zhukova, N (2328) chess.com 2020. Black was quite comfortable here.

B2) Black could also have taken on e5 first. 9...dxe5 10.Nxe5 Nxe5 11.dxe5 Bf5 Now ...Bf5-d3 is a nasty threat and the complications deriving from 12.e6 Bd3 13.exf7+ Kh8∞ could end up positively for Black in view of the enemy king being stuck in the center.

9.dxc5!

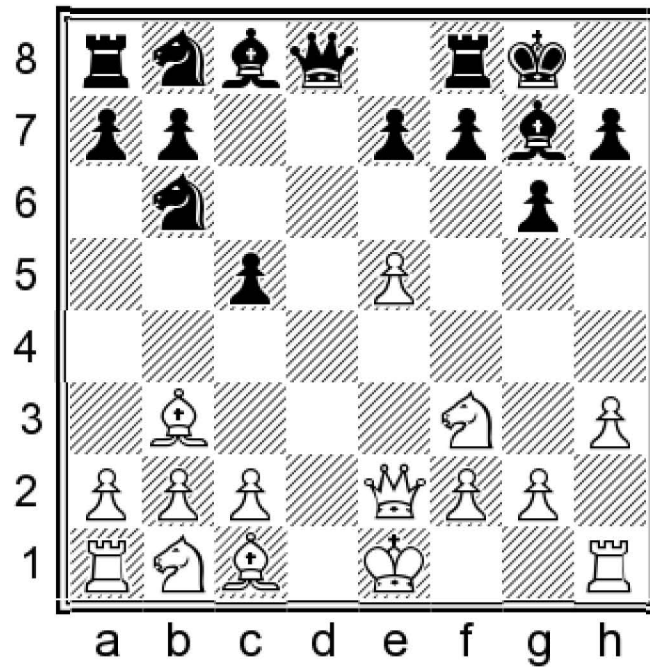
The only other sensible try is the push 9.e6, which White can play almost at any moment from now on. It hasn't been tested yet for the simple reason that 9.dxc5 is stronger.



Position after: 9.e6

9...Bxe6 10.Bxe6 fxe6 11.dxc5 dxc5 The position is about equal, whether White now takes on e6 or castles instead.

9...dxc5

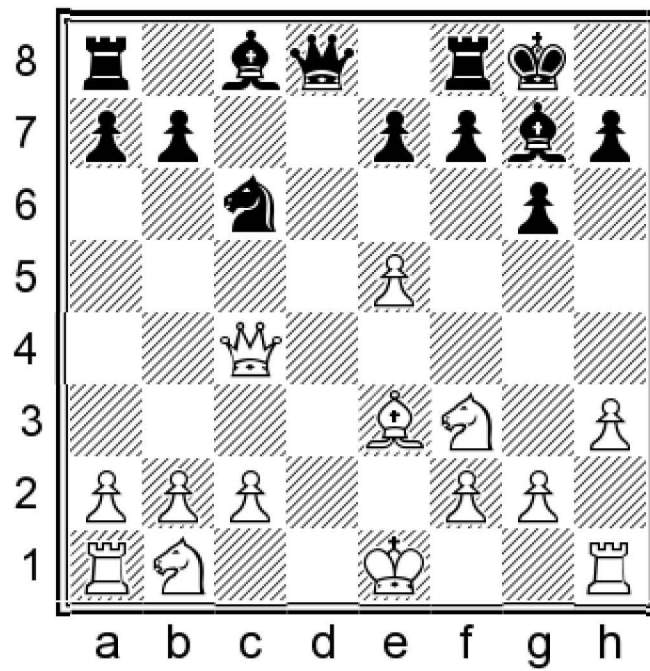


Position after: 9...dxc5

White has tried several moves at this juncture, but without showing anything convincing.

10.0-0

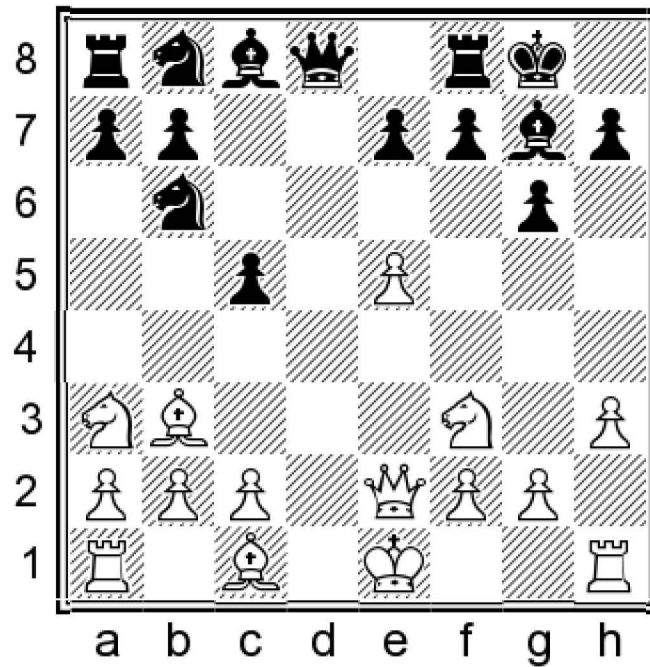
A) 10.Be3?! c4 11.Bxc4 Instinctively one feels that White should keep his dark-squared bishop. [11.Bxb6 Qxb6 12.Qxc4 Nc6 is at least equal for Black.] 11...Nxc4 12.Qxc4 Nc6=



Position after: 12...Nc6=

After his inaccuracy White had a worse version of 10.0-0 in Stevic, H (2575) – Kovacevic, B (2410) Vinkovci 2020.

B) 10.Na3



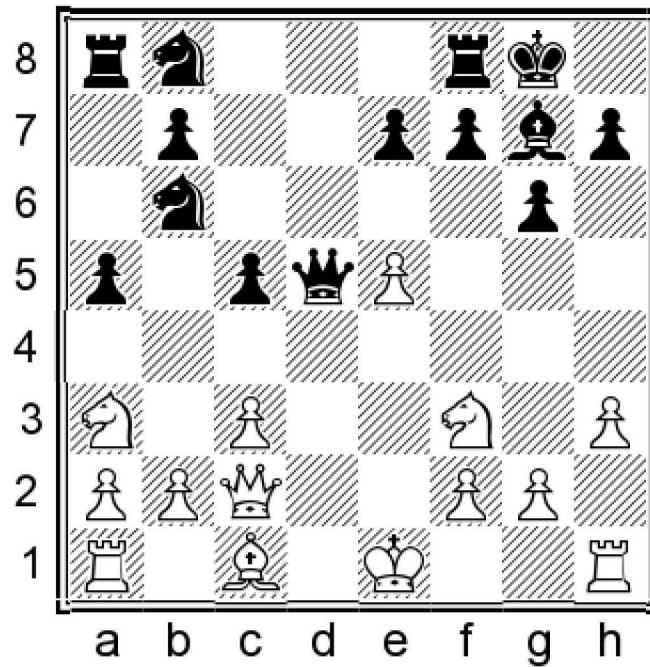
Position after: 10.Na3

B1) 10...Nc6 11.0-0! [This looks like an improvement over 11.c3 Bf5 12.Bc2?! (12.e6! ∞) 12...Bxc2 13.Nxc2 Qd5³, which was more comfortable for Black in the recent blitz game Lagarde, M (2599) – Fier, A (2543) Le Blanc-Mesnil 2019.] Now if 11...Na5 then 12.e6! is in White's favor according to the engine.

B2) 10...a5! 11.c3 Bf5



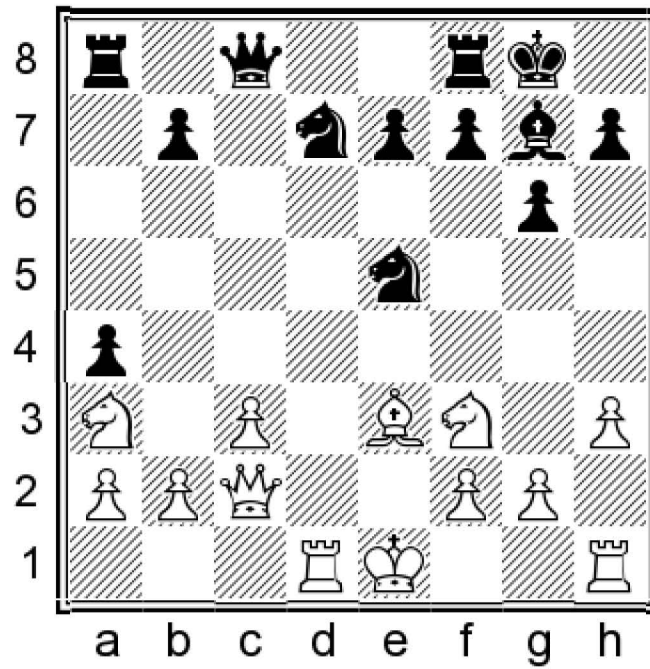
B2.2) 12.Bc2 Bxc2 13.Qxc2 [13.Nxc2 is a superior version of Lagarde – Fier, see 10...Nc6 11.c3, where rather than having developed his knight Black has weakened his queenside.] 13...Qd5



Position after: 13...Qd5

This was seen in Talpak, T (2468) – Schmidt, L (2402) ICCF email 2016, which ended peacefully. If White is better then it is more symbolic than anything real.

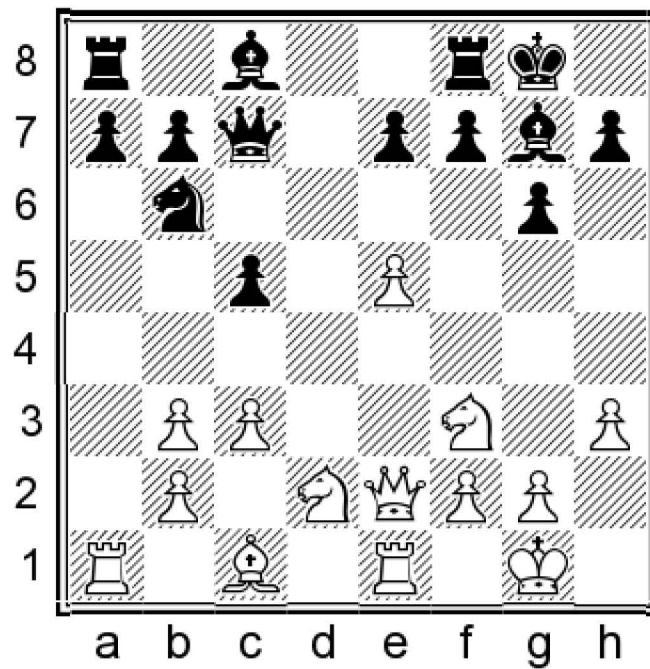
B2.3) 12.Be3 a4 [12...Bd3!?] 13.Bc2 Bxc2 14.Qxc2 Nc6 [14...Qd5 deserves attention too.] 15.Rd1 Qc8 16.Bxc5 Nd7 17.Be3 Ncxe5



Position after: 17...Ncxe5

Black had more or less equalized in Talpak, T (2468) – Kural, A (2380)
ICCF email 2016.

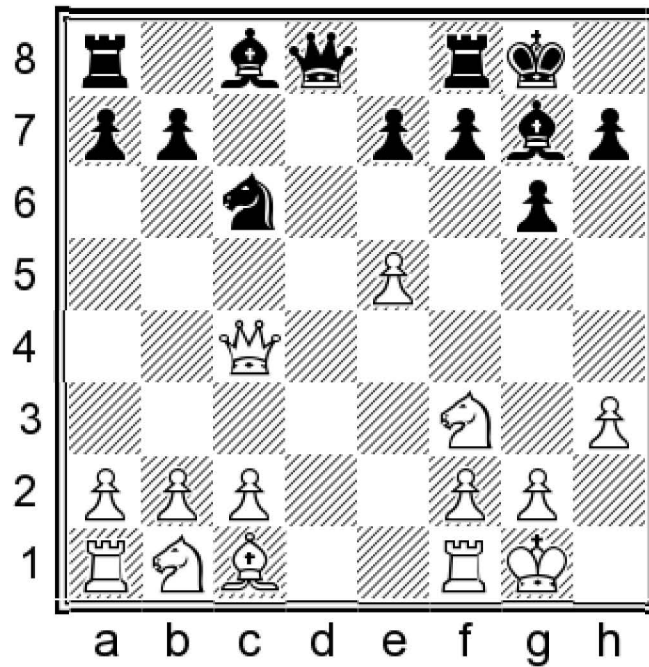
C) 10.Nbd2 Nc6 11.0-0 Na5 12.Re1 [12.e6!?] 12...Qc7 13.c3 Nxb3
14.axb3



Position after: 14.axb3

14...h6 Black needs to find an improvement on what follows. [14...Bf5 could be an idea, now or on the next move.] 15.Ne4 Be6 16.c4 a5 17.Bf4² Karjakin, S (2752) – Riazantsev, A (2638) lichess.org 2020. With 18.Qe3 coming next, it turned out that Black was missing a tempo to gain full parity with his ...a5-a4 plan.

10...c4 11.Bxc4 Nxc4 12.Qxc4 Nc6



Position after: 12...Nc6

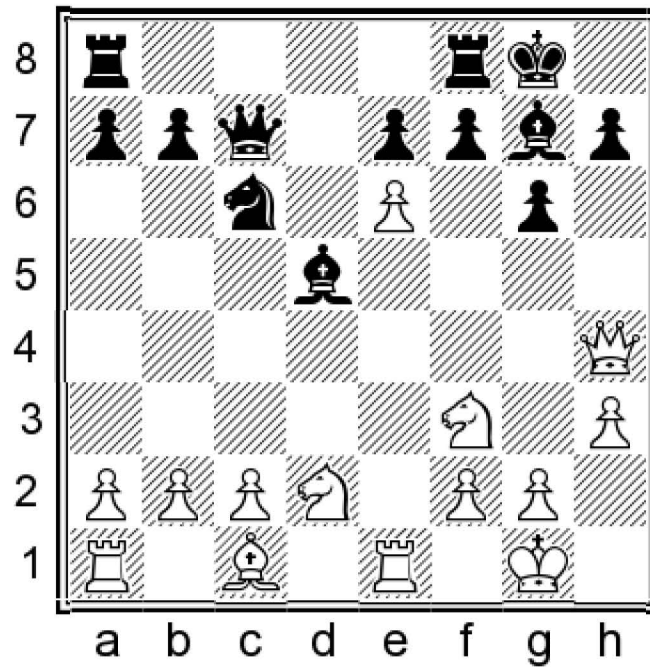
This position is critical to evaluate the validity of the black concept initiated by 8...c5. Potentially, if he recovers his sacrificed pawn, Black may have the brighter prospects thanks to his bishop pair. In practice he has achieved very decent results, at any rate significantly better than with the alternatives.

13.Nc3

A) 13.Bf4 Bf5 14.Nc3 Bxc2 Fedorchuk, S (2631) – Fier, A (2543) Le Blanc-Mesnil (blitz) 2019. White gave back his extra pawn in order to develop his knight on its best square. This is understandable, but it led only to an equal game.

B) 13.Re1

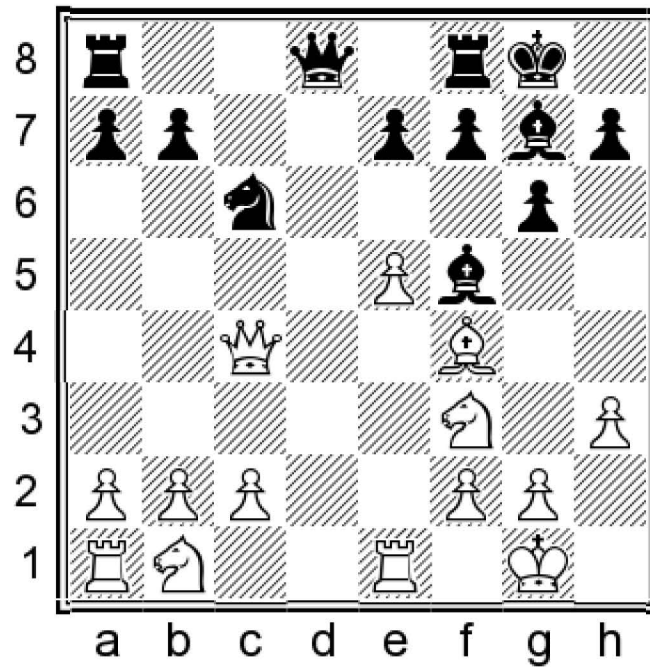
B1) 13...Be6 14.Qh4 Bd5 15.Nbd2 Qc7 [Or 15...Qa5 Parsons, L (2419) – Schmidt, L (2392) ICCF email 2017.] 16.e6



Position after: 16.e6

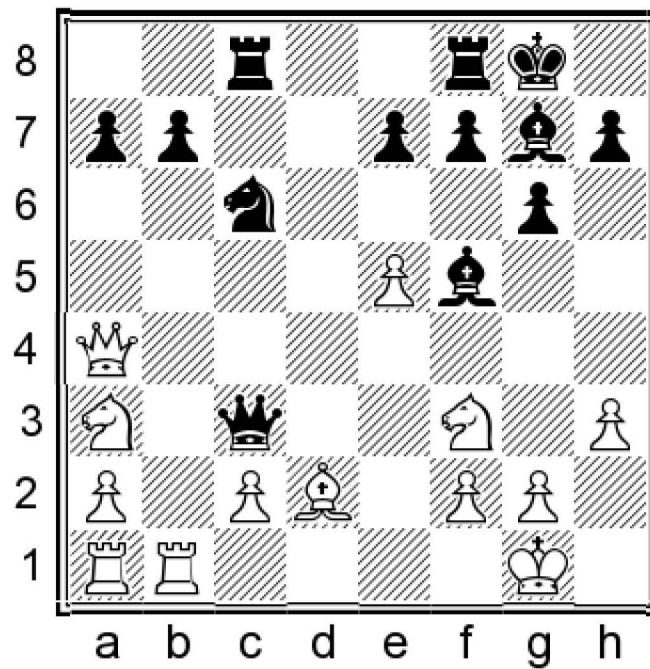
16...Bf6 [After the alternative 16...fxe6 White preserves some edge thanks to 17.Ng5 or 17.c4.] 17.exf7+ Rxf7 18.Qg4 Ne5 19.Nxe5 Bxe5 20.c4 Bc6 21.Ne4 Bd4 22.Be3 Bxb2² and eventually Black held in Pirhala, L (2323) – Valak, A (2339) ICCF email 2016.

B2) 13...Bf5 This move, targeting c2, could be stronger than its B1 alternative. 14.Bf4?! [The computeresque 14.Na3 played in Zhigalko, S – Avila Pavas, S chess.com 2020 may be White's best, but it's hardly frightening.]



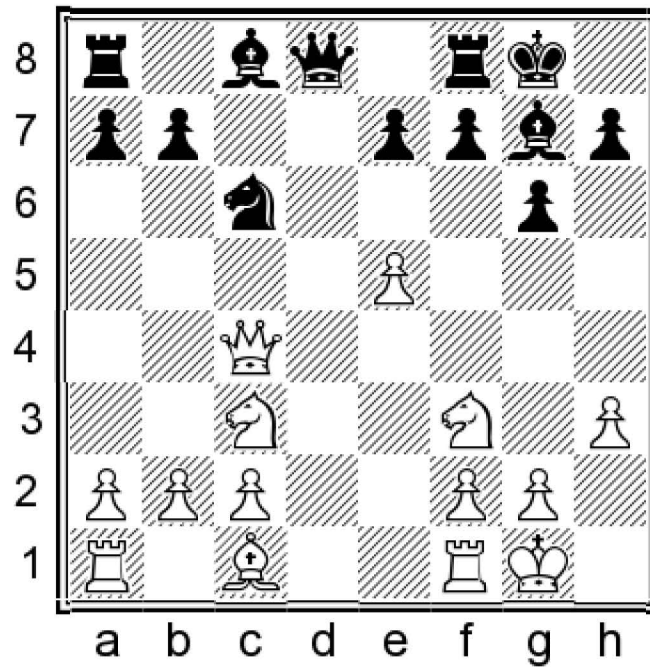
Position after: 14.Bf4?!

14...Rc8 We are following the blitz game Ziska, H (2533) – Fier, A (2543) Le Blanc-Mesnil 2019, where 14...Qb6 was already good. 15.Qa4 Qb6 16.Na3 Qxb2 [16...a6= was safer with the traditional compensation offered by this variation: two bishops, b2-pawn under attack and the white troops tied down to the protection of the e5-pawn.] 17.Reb1 Qc3 18.Bd2



Position after: 18.Bd2

The Brazilian GM now blundered with 18...Qc5?? and had to resign after 19.Rb5. He would have stayed in the game had he instead found 18...b5! 19.Qa6 Qc5 20.Rxb5 Nb8?.

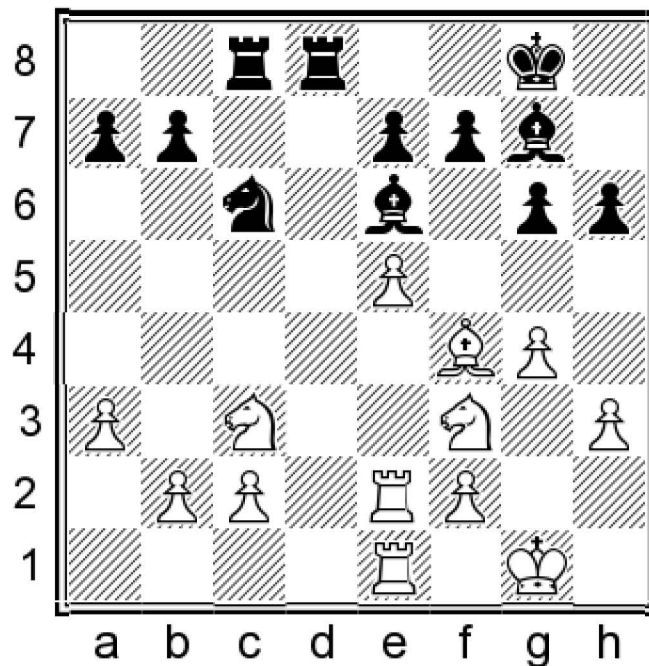


Position after: 13.Nc3

13...Qa5

13...Bf5 14.Rd1 Qa5 15.Rd5 Qb6 16.Rb5 Qa6© Dubuc, S (2313) – Schmidt, L (2402) ICCF email 2016. The rook feels a bit strange on b5!

14.Re1 Bf5 15.Bf4 Qb4 16.Qxb4 Nxb4 17.Re2 Rfd8 18.Rc1 h6 19.a3 Nc6 20.g4 Be6 21.Rce1 Rac8



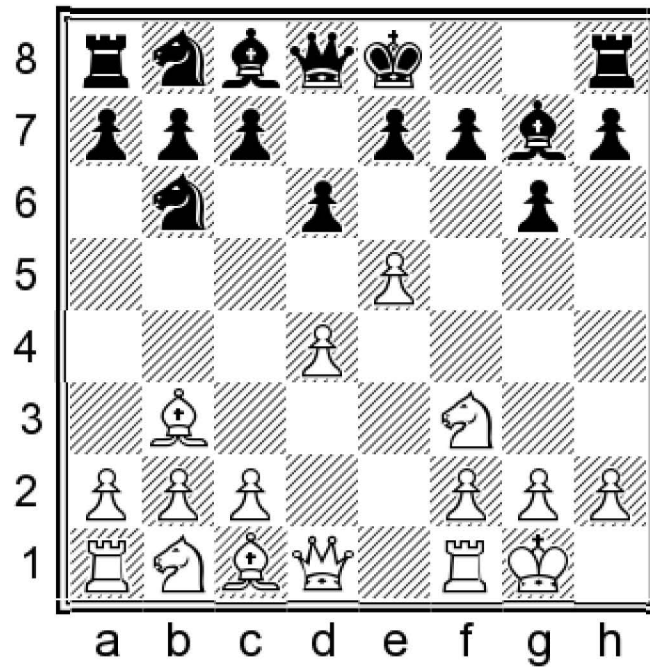
Position after: 21...Rac8

Black had adequate compensation in Johnson, B (2387) – Pavlov, V (2385) ICCF email 2011, which was soon agreed drawn.

Conclusion: As the current status of theory stands, the fresh move 8...c5 seems to be Black's best bet to get an active game if he is ready to sacrifice a pawn. In that case I'd suggest examining more closely Karjakin's 10.Nbd2. Older alternatives include 8...Nc6 (or 8...a5 first, when Black then chooses between 9...Nc6 and 9...Na6, and then 10...dxe5 and 11...Nc5) followed by either 9...Na5 or 9...a5, 10...dxe5 and 11...Nd4. These alternatives naturally deserve attention, but White usually emerges with a slight plus from the opening owing to his space advantage.

e) 7.0-0

1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.Nf3 g6 5.Bc4 Nb6 6.Bb3 Bg7 7.0-0



Position after: 7.0-0

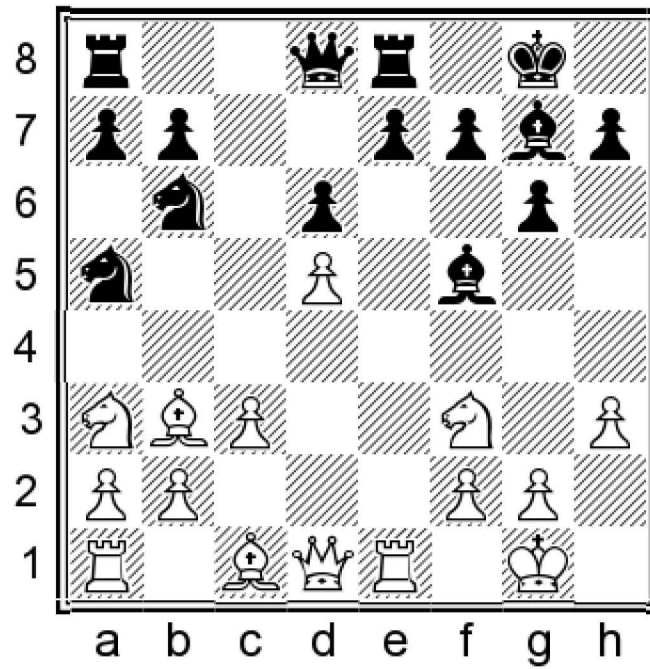
7...0-0

7...Nc6

A) 8.Qe2 and since 8...Bg4? runs into 9.Bxf7+! play will transpose into a variation covered elsewhere after 8...0-0 – see 7.Qe2 Nc6 8. 0-0 0-0.

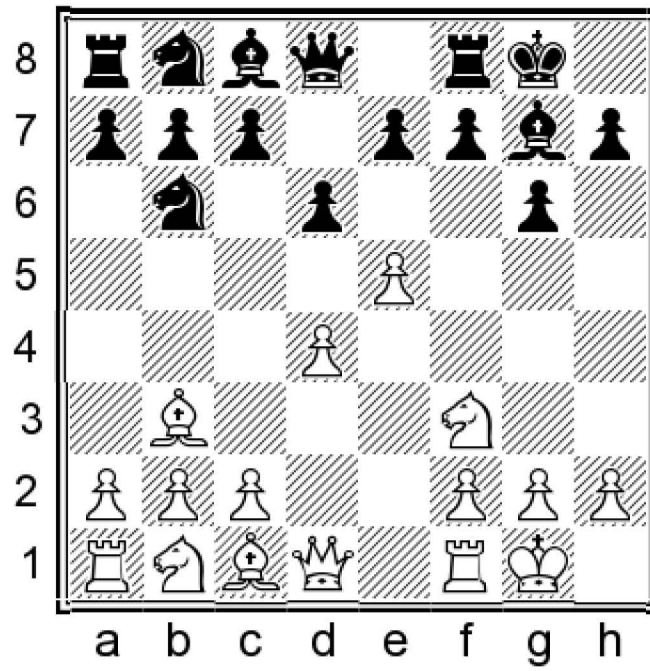
B) 8.a4 should transpose into the main line of 7.a4 after 8...dxe5 9.a5 Nd7 10.Bxf7+ and so on, where White has committed himself to 14.0-0 rather than the better 14.c3!.

C) 8.exd6 cxd6 9.c3 0-0 10.d5 [10.Re1 transposes into lines seen under 7.exd6.] 10...Na5 11.Re1 Re8 12.h3 Bf5 13.Na3



Position after: 13.Na3

This occurred in Yu, Y (2675) – Ma, Q (2559) China 2013, where for some reason the machine prefers 13...Qc7 (intending a knight sally to c4) over the game continuation 13...Rc8?! 14.Be3².

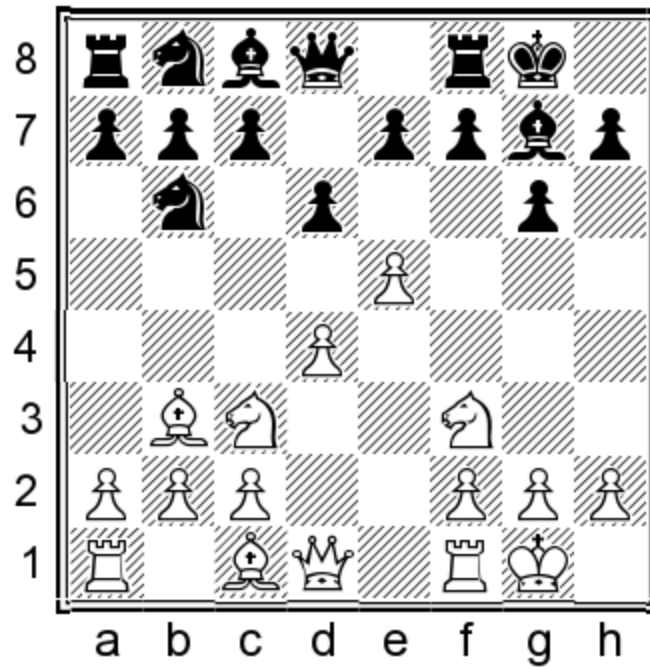


Position after: 7...0-0

8.h3

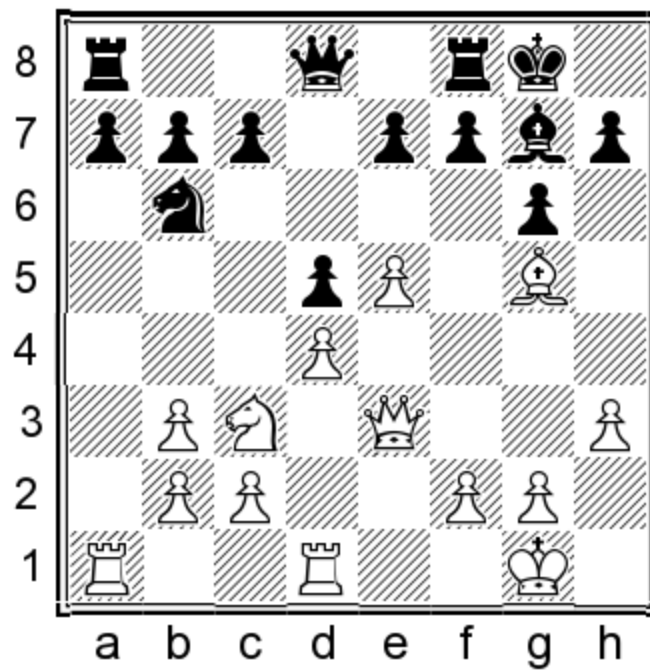
A) For 8.exd6 see 7.exd6.

B) 8.Nc3



Position after: 8.Nc3

B1) 8...Bg4?!/? 9.h3 Bxf3 10.Qxf3 Nc6 11.Rd1 Na5 [11...Qc8!/?] 12.Bg5 Nxb3 13.axb3 d5 14.Qe3



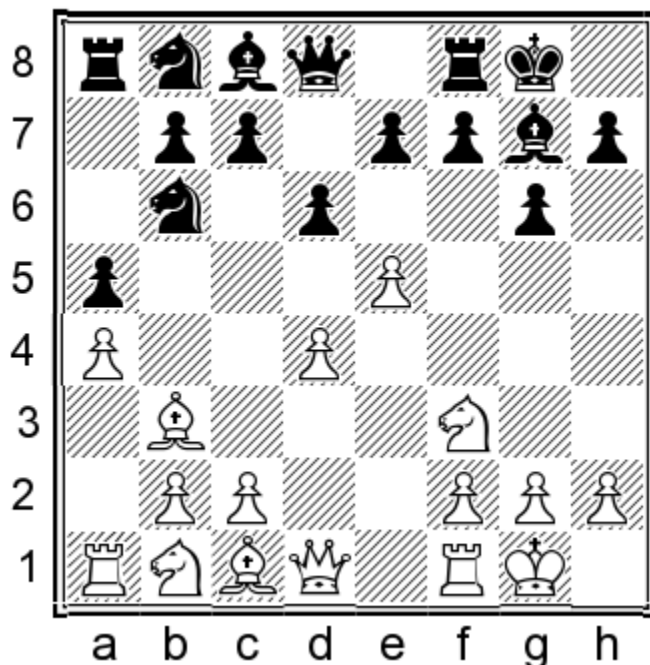
Position after: 14.Qe3

Abdusattorov, N (2644) – Fier, A (2539) chess.com 2020. White has gained a neat opening edge.

B2) 8...Nc6! 9.exd6 [9.e6?! fxe6 is not to be feared, notably because Black can then close the a2-g8 diagonal by means of ...d6-d5.] 9...cxd6∞

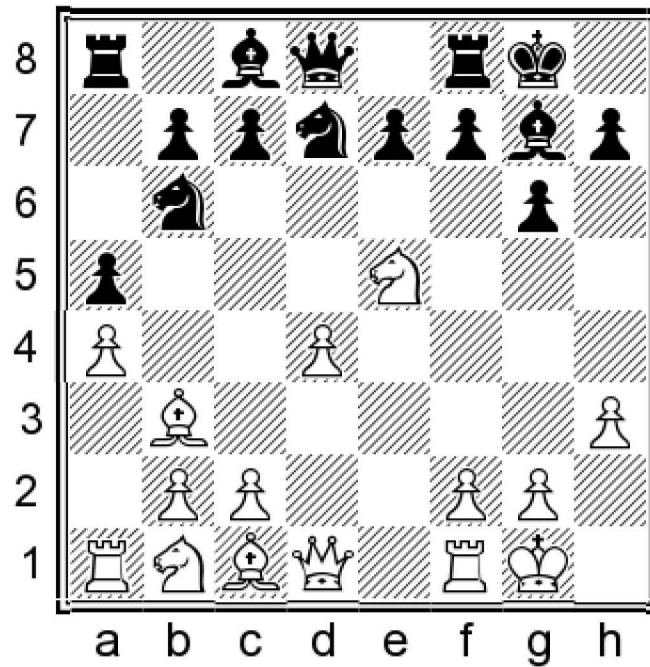
C) 8.a4!?

C1) It seems that the insertion of 8.a4 a5 works in White's favor and secures him a pleasant advantage. 8...a5



Position after: 8...a5

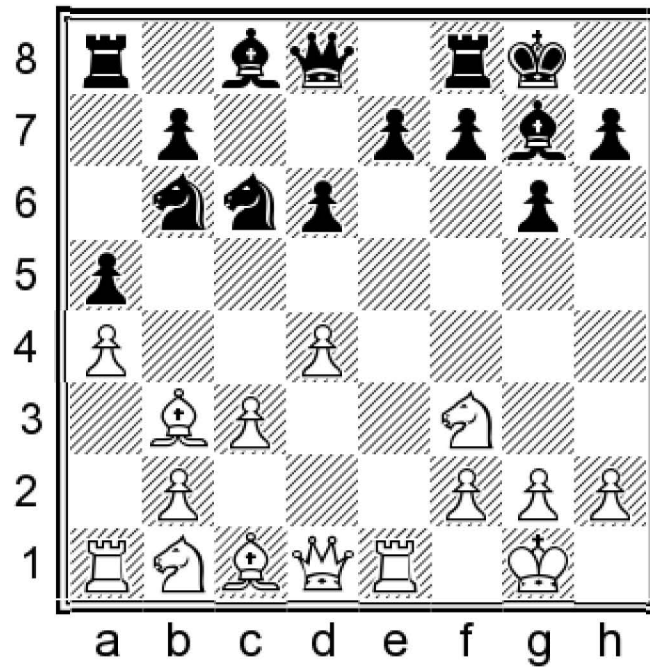
C1.1) 9.h3?! dxe5 10.Nxe5 N8d7 [10...c5 could be playable even if the circumstances are less propitious than with the pawns on a2 and a7; 10...Nc6 looks quite interesting as well: 11.Nxc6 bxc6 12.c3 Rb8∞ Rodriguez Vargas, O – Torre, E Skopje 1972]



Position after: 10...N8d7

11.Ng4! [11.Nxd7 Bxd7 Kasparov, S (2470) – Berkes, F (2640) Paracin 2016 also seems a tad better for White, albeit less testing.] 11...e6 Now rather than 12.Bh6 Bxh6 13.Nxh6+ Kg7 14.Ng4 Nf6 as played in Wahls, M (2535) – Nijboer, F (2475) Lucerne 1989, the engine claims that White stands slightly for choice following 12.Nh6+ Kh8 13.c3.

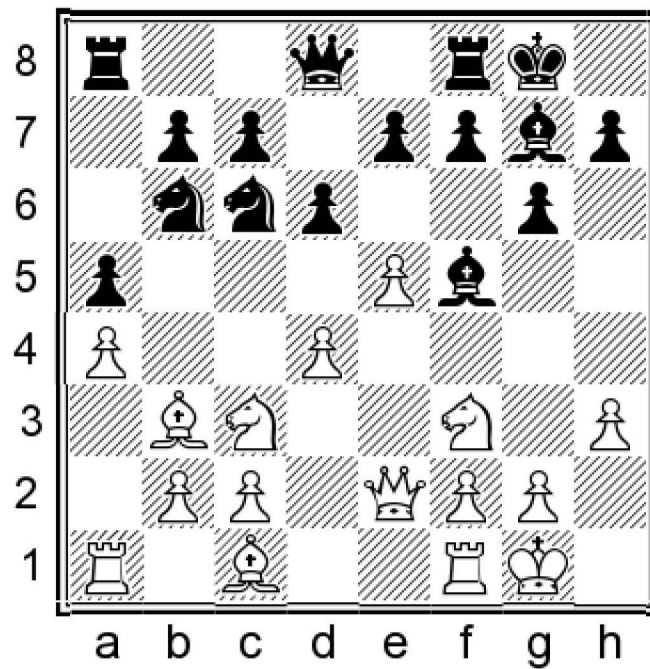
C1.2) 9.Re1 Bg4 10.exd6 exd6 11.c3² Dgebuadze, A (2535) – Polaczek, R (2431) Arnhem (rapid) 2006, or 9...Nc6 10.exd6 cxd6 11.c3²



Position after: 11.c3²

We have met this position without the duet a2-a4 and ...a7-a5 under 7.exd6. If Black now plays in the same vein, 11...e5 12.Bg5 Qc7 13.Na3, it becomes clear he has obtained a worse version.

C1.3) I am less fond of 9.Qe2 because of 9...Bg4! ∞ . Black has also tried other moves: 9...Nc6 [9...d5 10.h3² Tari, A (2509) – Rozentalis, E (2549) Fagernes 2015; this position is no tragedy for Black but White has a stable plus based on his space advantage] 10.h3 Bf5 11.Nc3 Hamdouchi, H (2520) – Solozhenkin, E (2510) Clichy 1997.



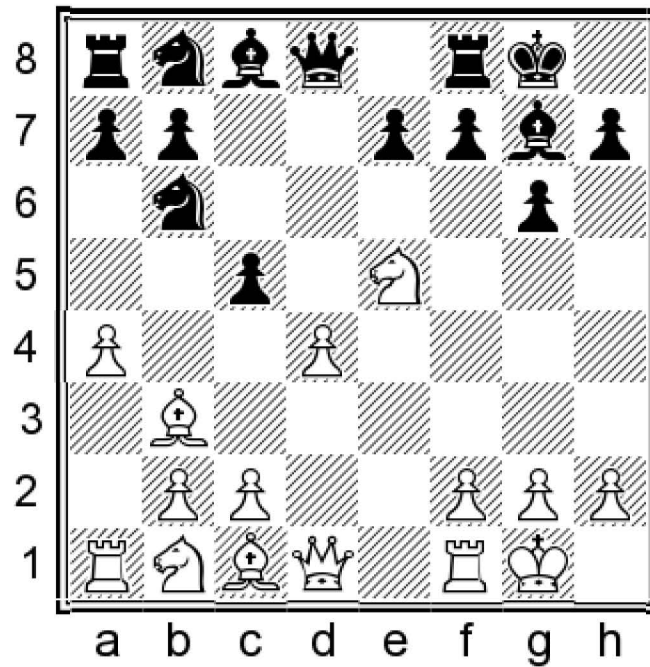
Position after: 11.Nc3

Here the Russian GM now erred with 11...Qc8? 12.e6!±. He should instead have gone 11...d5, limiting the white edge to something quite bearable.

C1.4) 9.exd6 exd6 10.Bg5 [10.Re1 – see 9.Re1; as mentioned earlier, transpositions are numerous in this branch of the Alekhine tree!]

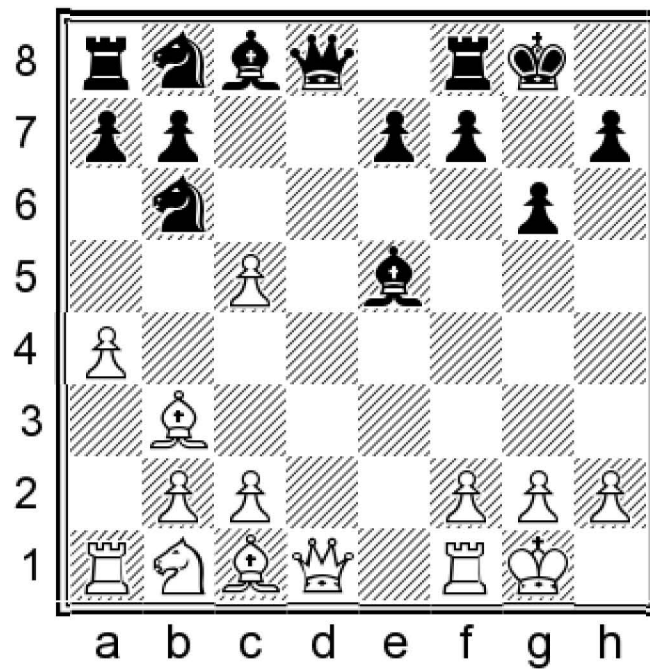
10...Bf6 11.Qd2² Oratovsky, M (2411) – Polaczek, R (2363) Penafiel 2020.

C2) 8...dxe5! 9.Nxe5 c5



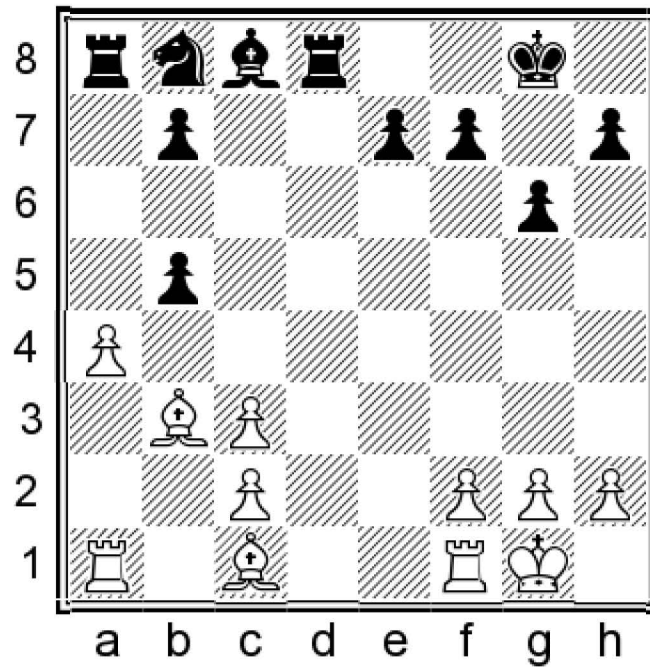
Position after: 9...c5

This is Kornev's recipe to equality in *Play the Alekhine Defence*. I agree with him that Black can gradually solve his opening problems this way.
 10.dxc5 [Or 10.a5 N6d7 11.Ng4, when play may continue this way:
 11...Kh8 12.Nh6 e6 13.d5 Ne5 14.dxe6 Bxe6 15.Bxe6 fxe6 16.Qxd8
 Rxd8= Semmler, R (2341) – Reichert, T (2338) ICCF email 2016.]
 10...Bxe5



Position after: 10...Bxe5

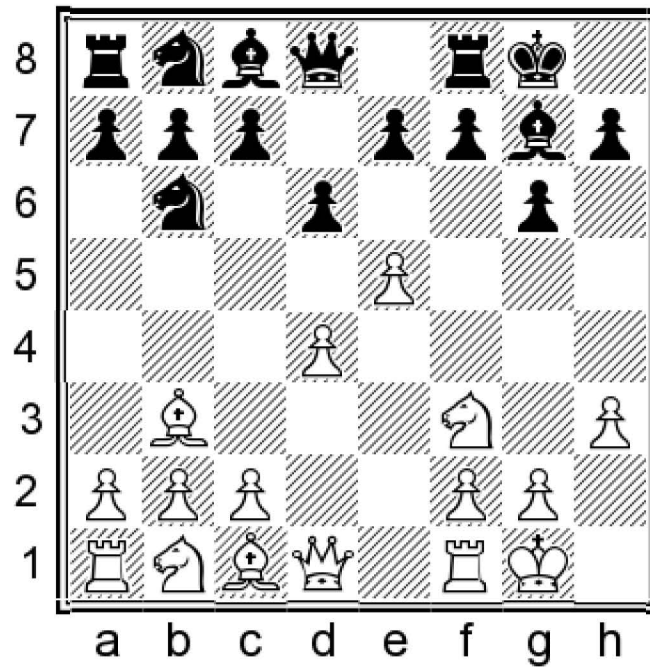
C2.1) The endgame deriving from 11.Qxd8 doesn't promise White much either: 11...Rxd8 12.cxb6 axb6 13.Nc3 Bxc3 [or 13...Nc6] 14.bxc3 b5.



Position after: 14...b5

Getting rid of a weakness, Black sidesteps an eventual Be3, Morais, G (2365) – Rain, R (2384) ICCF email 2006.

C2.2) 11.cxb6 Qxb6= Darini, P (2497) – Noroozi, O (2356) Bushehr 2018. Here we have the same position as after 8.h3 dxe5 9.Nxe5 c5 10.dxc5 Bxe5 11.cxb6 Qb6 but where White has played a2-a4 in place of h2-h3, which is somewhat inferior for him.

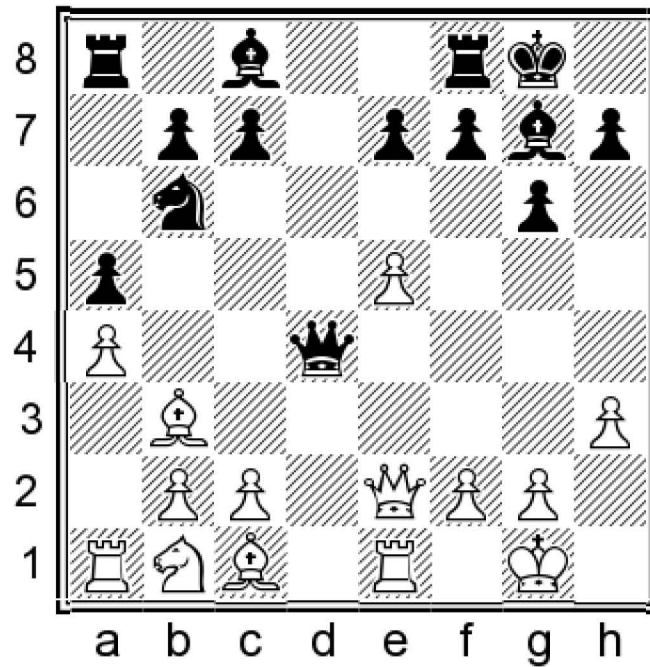


Position after: 8.h3

8...a5

A) 8...dxe5 9.Nxe5 N8d7 [or 9...c5 10.dxc5 Bxe5 11.cxb6 Qxb6 also with a slight edge for White] 10.Qe2 Nxe5 11.dxe5 Qd4 12.Re1² Bologan, V (2640) – Bortnyk, O (2581) Tallinn (blitz) 2016.

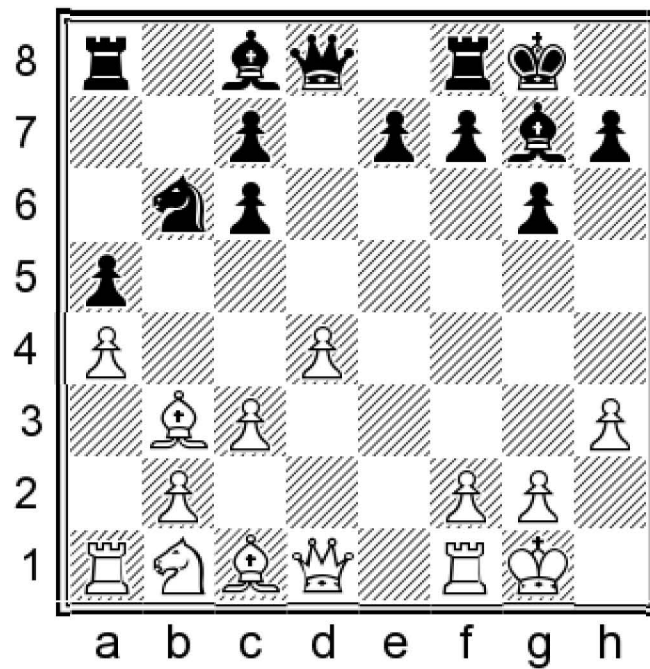
B) 8...Nc6 9.Qe2 a5 [9...Na5 10.Nc3 Nxb3 11.axb3 was a bit better for White in Karjakin, S (2752) – Fier, A (2560) chess.com 2020 although Black is not without chances.] 10.a4! [10.c3?! allows Black too much freedom: 10...a4 11.Bc2 Be6 12.Na3 Bd5 13.exd6 exd6 with equality in Polgar, J (2635) – Khalifman, A (2655) Amsterdam 1995.] 10...dxe5 [10...Bf5 or 10...d5 11.c3 also deserve attention, with the same assessment though.] 11.dxe5 Nd4 12.Nxd4 Qxd4 13.Re1



Position after: 13.Re1

This is Bologan – Bortnyk with a2-a4 and ...a7-a5 included. At this crossroads Black has experimented with ...Bd7-c6, preceded or not by ...e7-e6, and the most frequent 13...Be6 14.Bxe6 fxe6 15.Nd2. In all three cases White remains slightly on top.

9.a4 dxe5 10.Nxe5 Nc6 11.Nxc6 bxc6 12.c3



Position after: 12.c3

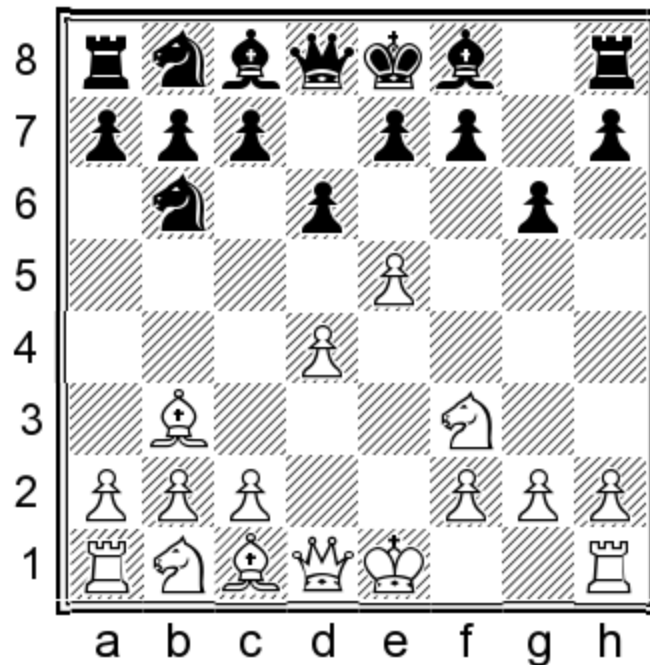
12...Rb8

We have seen this under the move order 8.a4 a5 9.h3.

For the record, Kornev also mentions 12...e5!? here, claiming that Black is fine there too.

f) 7.Ng5 e6 8.f4 dxe5 9.fxe5

1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.Nf3 g6 5.Bc4 Nb6 6.Bb3



Position after: 6.Bb3

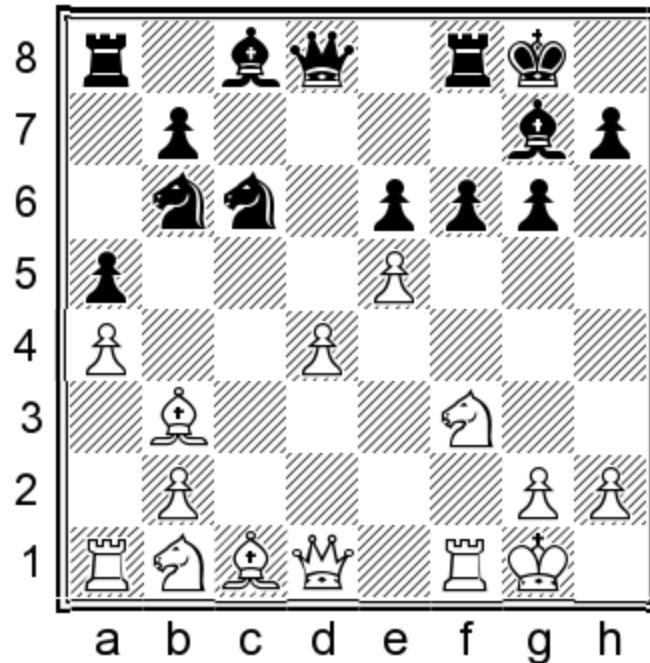
6...Bg7

White has several promising ways to deal with 6...Nc6?!, namely 7.a4, 7.exd6, intending 7...cxd6 8.d5, 7.Ng5 e6 8.Qf3, and last but not least the typical and dangerous pawn sac 7.e6 fxe6 8.Ng5. Since White seems to secure an edge everywhere I'd recommend avoiding 6...Nc6 and sticking to the well-trodden 6...Bg7.

7.Ng5

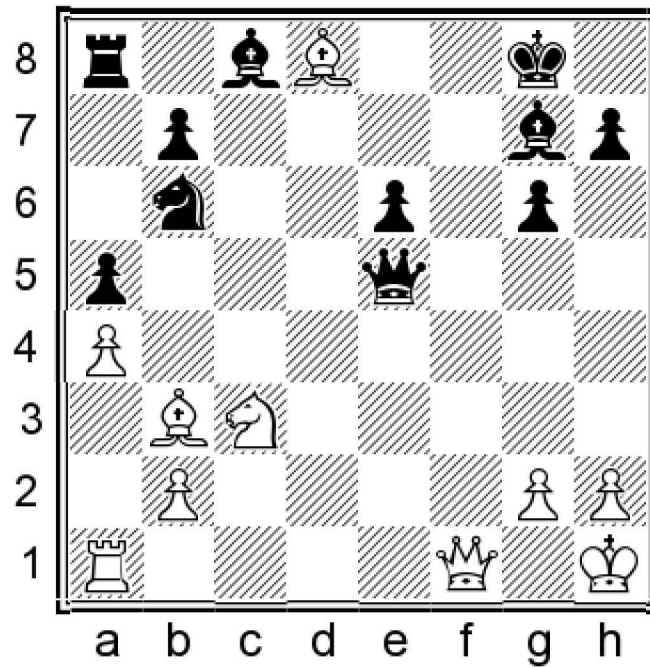
A small digression, if you will allow me, as the following game clearly fits better here than in the 7.a4 section, where “our” reply is ...dxe5 and not 7...a5.

7.a4 a5 8.Ng5 e6 9.f4 dxe5 10.fxe5 c5 11.c3 cxd4 12.0-0 0-0 13.cxd4 Nc6
14.Nf3 f6



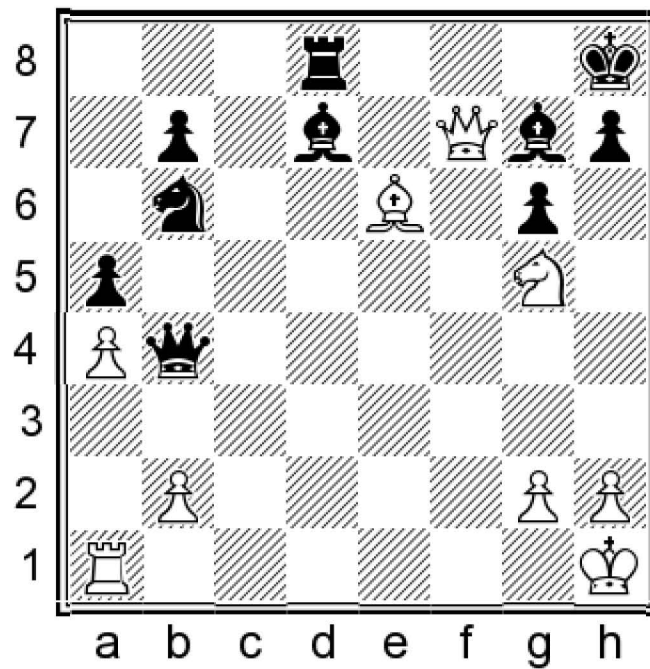
Position after: 14...f6

15.Nc3! fxe5 Other moves aren't any better. 16.Bg5 Qd7 17.dxe5 Nxe5
18.Nxe5 Rxf1+?? The decisive mistake, whereas trading queens before
recapturing on e5 leaves Black decent chances to hold the ending
[18...Qxd1!²]. 19.Qxf1 Qd4+ 20.Kh1 Qxe5 21.Bd8!



Position after: 21.Bd8!

A good reason to prefer 7...dxe5, and the explanation of my digression. In contrast with positions that derive from 7.Ng5, the black horse is hanging here. 21...Qc5 [Black is losing anyway, and even our Alekhine hero Ricardo Rain had to concede defeat in the following correspondence game: 21...Ra6 22.Rd1 h6 23.Qd3 Nd7 24.Qxg6+- Figlio, G (2455) – Rain, R (2381) corr 2000] 22.Ne4 Qb4 23.Ng5 Kh8 24.Qf7 Bd7 25.Bxe6 Rxd8



Position after: 25...Rxd8

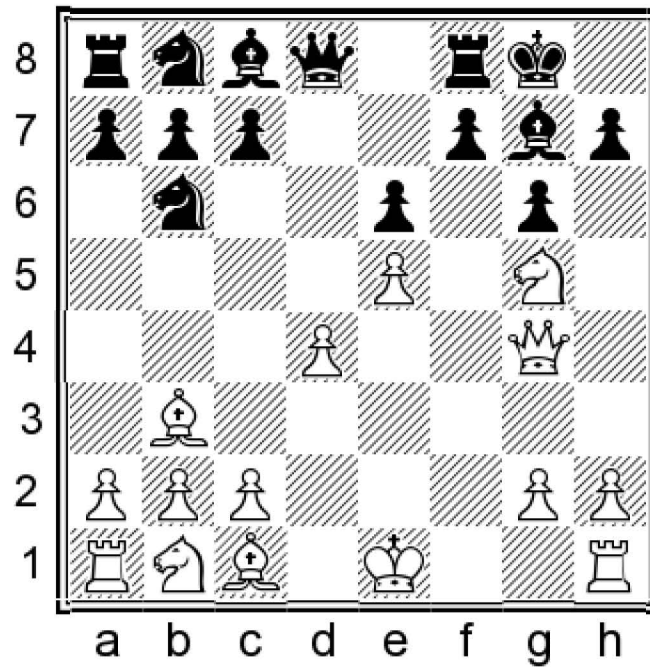
As a true sportsman Ponomariov lets White finish in style: 26.Qg8+ Rxd8 27.Nf7# Grischuk, A (2606) – Ponomariov, R (2630) Torshavn 2000.

7...e6

Closing the centre by means of 7...d5?! deprives Black of a major source of counterplay and is therefore suspicious. Most of the games continue then 8.f4 f6 9.Nf3² when White enjoys an enduring plus owing to his space advantage. Since there are no forcing lines here, I see little point in adding more details.

8.f4 dxe5 9.fxe5 c5

Kornev claims that 9...0-0 “looks more reliable” but in my opinion it unnecessarily allows White the extra option 10.Qg4!?, tried only four times according to my database.



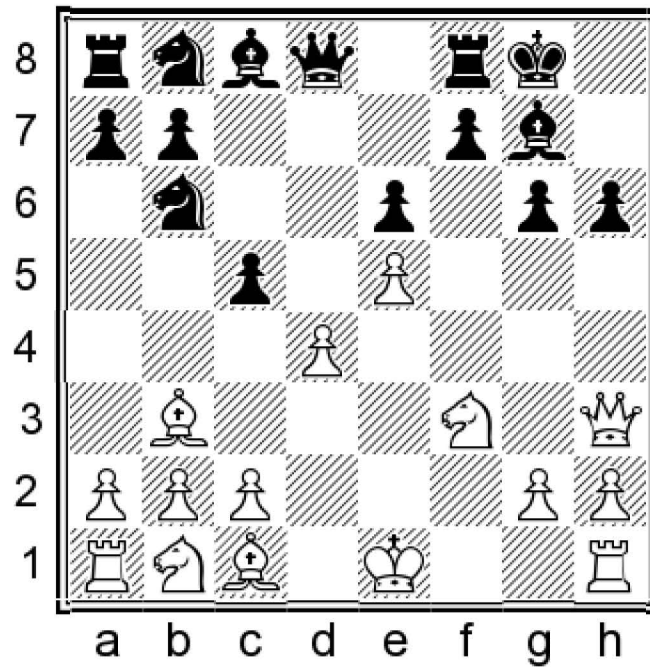
Position after: 10.Qg4!?

All the wild stuff that now follows is irrelevant if Black opts for 9...c5, but it represents a good exercise if you want to analyze some entertaining lines.

A) Curiously, the logical 10...c5 hasn't been tested.

A1) In the event of 11.dxc5?! White's center collapses before his attack has even started, and Black stands better after either 11...N6d7 or 11...Nd5.

A2) 11.Qh3 h6 [11...h5? 12.dxc5 N6d7 13.g4, with the exact opposite of what happens after 11.dxc5?!.] 12.Nf3

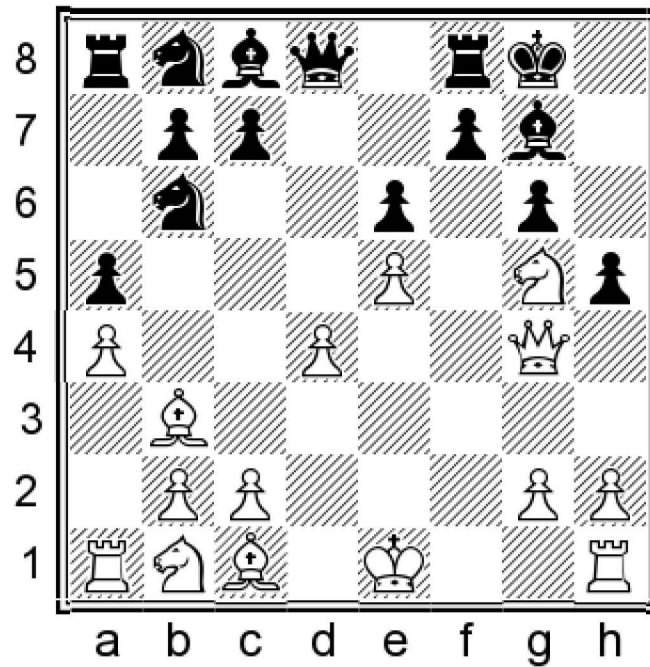


Position after: 12.Nf3

Now the principled move is the greedy 12...c4 but this requires thorough analysis to make sure Black survives the assault following 13.Bxh6 f5 14.Bd2 Qe7 15.0-0 or 13...f6 14.Nbd2 cxb3 15.Ne4©.

B) 10...a5

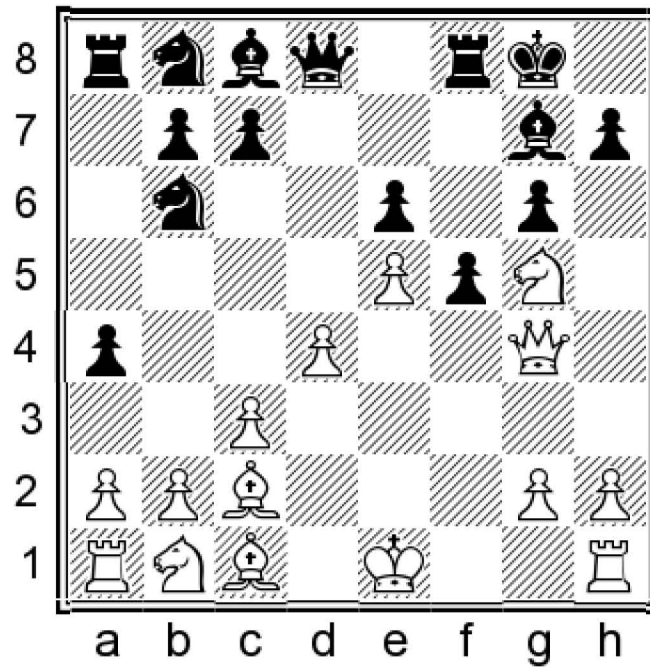
B1) 11.a4!? h5!



Position after: 11...h5!

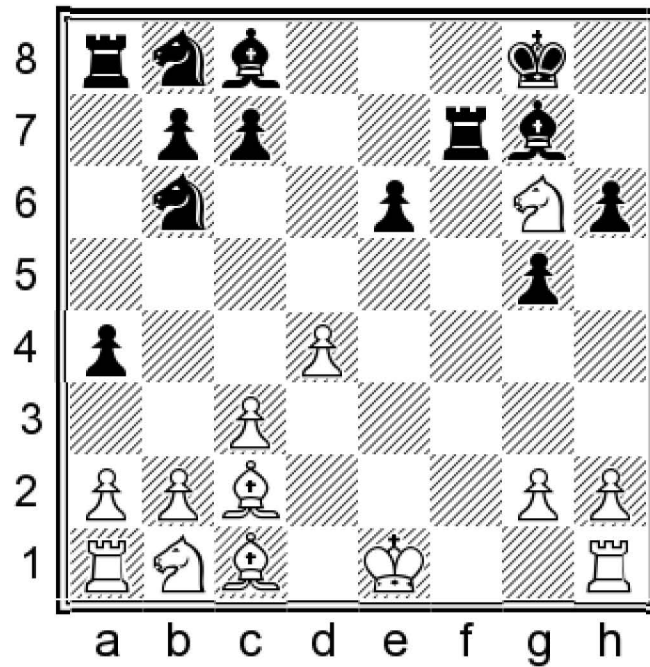
This timely push, sidestepping 12.Qh3 h5 13.g4 because White has to cover d4, was the theme of Emelyanov, M (2536) – Pavlov, V (2423) ICCF email 2015. I won't go into details, but a brief check convinced me that this correspondence game was conducted quite sensibly by both sides. 12.Qh4 [12.Qe4!?] 12...c5 13.c3 Nc6 14.0-0 cxd4 15.g4 dxc3 16.bxc3 f6 17.Nxe6 Bxe6 18.Bxe6+ Kh8 19.gxh5 fxe5 20.Rxf8+ Bxf8 21.Bg5 Qd1+ 22.Kg2 Qe2+ 23.Kg3 Qe1+ 24.Kh3 Qf1+ Here a draw was agreed.

B2) 11.c3 a4 12.Bc2 f5



Position after: 12...f5

13.exf6 [13.Qh3 h6 14.Nf3 g5 15.g4 c5∞ Havumaki, A (2416) – Pavlov, V (2431) ICCF email 2016; the board is on fire and any result is possible] 13...Qxf6 14.Qh4 h6 15.Nf3 Qxh4+ 16.Nxh4 g5 17.Ng6 Rf7

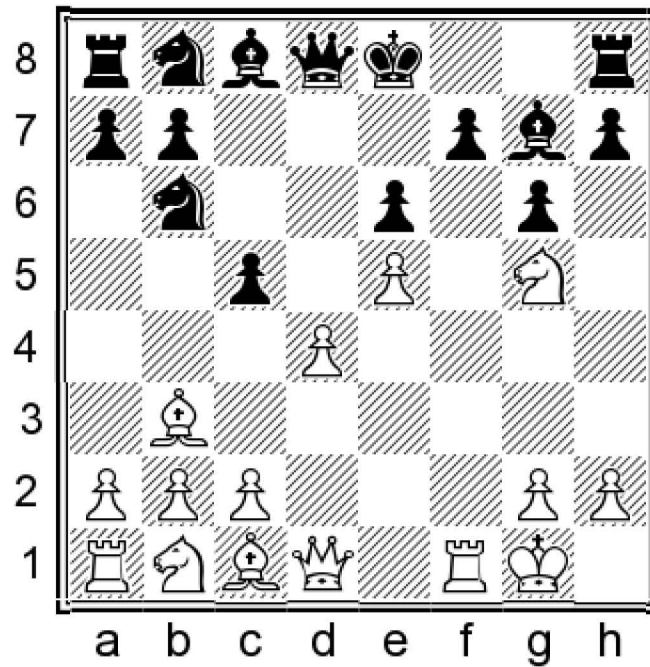


Position after: 17...Rf7

This was about level in Parshin, V (2330) – Pavlov, V (2420) ICCF email 2014. This variation, 10.Qg4 a5, is thoroughly covered by Kornev, who comes to identical conclusions.

10.0-0

10.c3 comes to the same thing.



Position after: 10.0-0

10...0-0

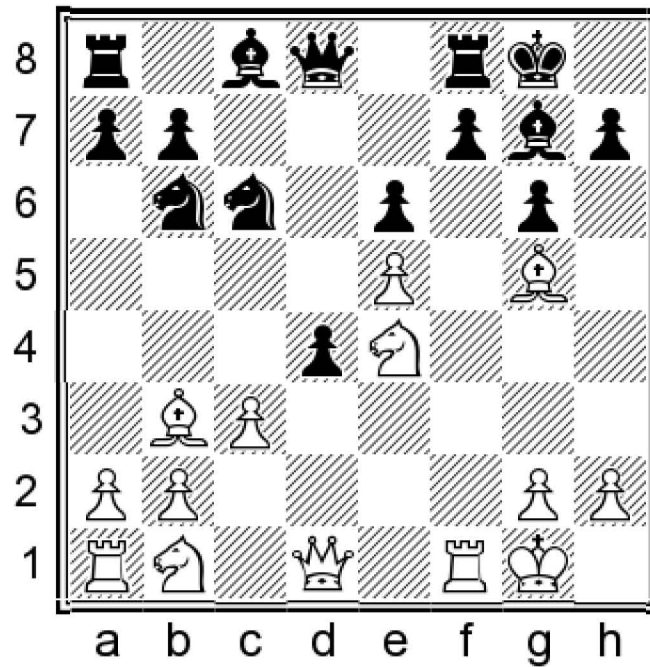
10...Qxd4+?! 11.Qxd4 cxd4 is better for White after either capture on f7.

11.c3

11.dxc5!? Qxd1 12.Rxd1 N6d7 is around equal, White enjoying good piece-play in return for his worse pawn structure.

11...cxd4

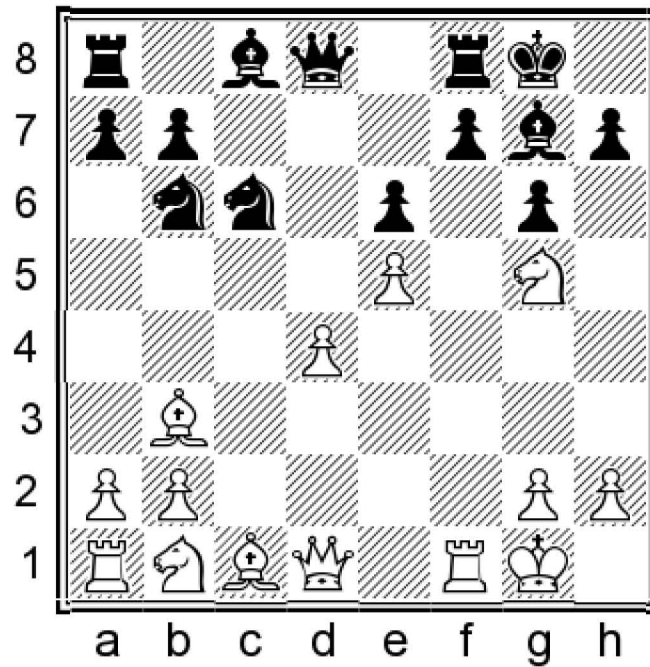
11...Nc6 This will probably transpose if White retreats 12.Nf3, but there is also 12.Ne4!? cxd4 13.Bg5 which happened in Bellin, J – Bruce, R Lublin 1969.



Position after: 13.Bg5

At this stage, rather than 13...Qc7? 14.cxd4, Black should have embarked upon the messy 13...dxc3! 14.Bxd8 cxb2 15.Nbd2 bxa1=Q 16.Qxa1 Bxe5 17.Qe1 Nxd8∞.

12.cxd4 Nc6



Position after: 12...Nc6

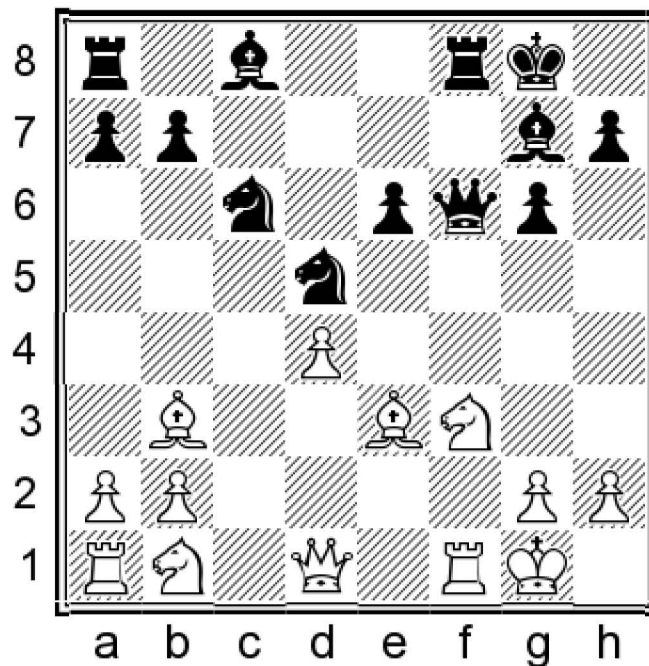
13.Nf3

13.Be3?! is a bad idea due to 13...Nd5.

13...f6 14.exf6

14.Nc3 fxe5 15.Bg5 Qd7 This will lead to a favorable version of the Grischuk – Ponomarev game for Black (see 7.a4 a5 in the introduction of this section). White has enough compensation to claim equality here but not more.

14...Qxf6 15.Be3 Nd5



Position after: 15...Nd5

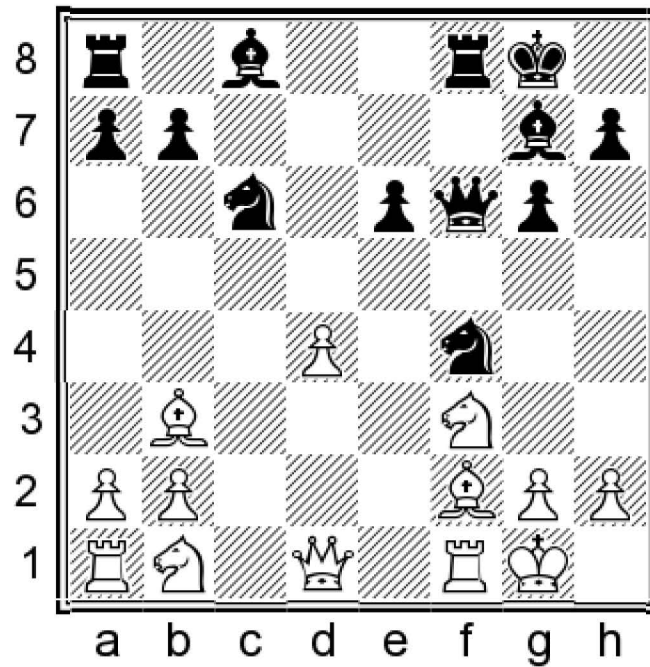
16.Bf2

Keeping an eye on d4.

A) 16.Bxd5?! Nothing justifies this exchange, which concedes the pair of bishops and activates the sleepy one on c8. 16...exd5 17.Nc3 Bg4 18.Nxd5 Qe6 19.Qb3 Rad8 20.h3 This was Lamarche Rodriguez, L (2386) – Pena Gomez, E (2269) Brazil 2001, where rather than 20...Rfe8 Black should have preferred 20...Bxh3!³.

B) 16.Bg5?! Is equally misguided since after 16...Qf5 White loses the tempo he has just won because of the threat 17...Nxd4.

16...Nf4



Position after: 16...Nf4

This active knight sally is best.

We have arrived at an important juncture. Black is supposed to be doing fine here, but some knowledge is needed.

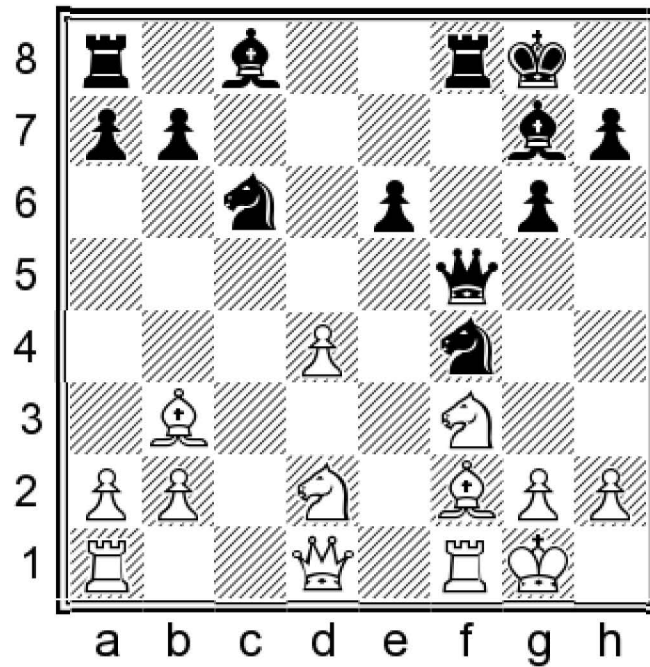
17.Nc3

This natural move is the most challenging, although its alternatives have their merits too.

A) 17.Kh1?! is a bit too slow and following 17...b6 18.Nc3 Ba6 Black had equalized in Parushev, A (2259) – Ohtake, S (2465) ICCF email 2011.

B) 17.Nbd2 By overprotecting the f3-square White guards himself against a potential ...Nh3+, but he exerts less central influence. Notably, the d4-d5 push is not an option in the near future.

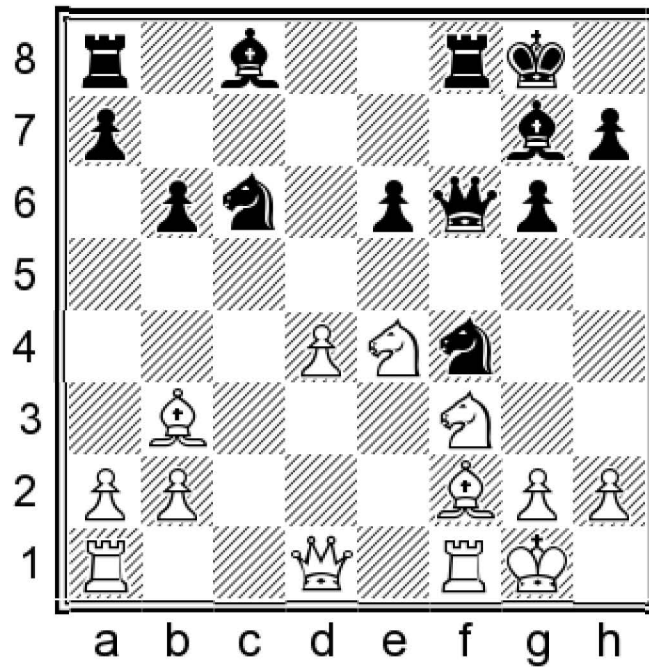
B1) In the event of the inaccurate 17...Qf5?!



Position after: 17...Qf5?!

White seizes the advantage thanks to the prophylactic 18.Kh1! [rushing with 18.Nc4?! runs into 18...Nh3+! 19.gxh3 Qxf3 20.Qxf3 Rxf3= Nayhebaver, M (2450) – Bilchinski, A (2295) Austria 2017] 18...Qg4 [18...Nb4 19.Nc4 and 18...Na5 19.Bc2 also fail to equalize] 19.Bg3² Rublevsky, S (2692) – Zvjaginsev, V (2672) Cheliabinsk 2016.

B2) 17...b6 18.Ne4

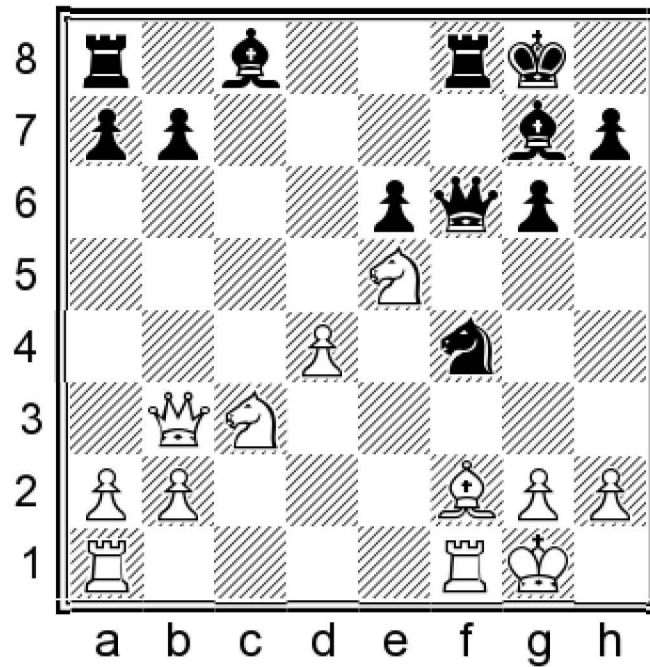


Position after: 18.Ne4

18...Qf5 Valderrama Quiceno, E – Avila Pavas, S Sabadell 2019 reached this position. [18...Qe7 19.Re1 Na5= with rough equality, Jensen, C (2366) – Rain, R (2253) ICCF email 2017.] 19.Nd6? [The better 19.Re1 would have kept the balance.] 19...Qg4! 20.Bg3 Ba6, with a marked edge for Black.

17...Nh3+

The attempt to diverge with 17...Na5 is riskier and leaves Black walking on a tightrope, as in the following example. 18.Ne5 [18.Be3!?] 18...Nxb3 19.Qxb3

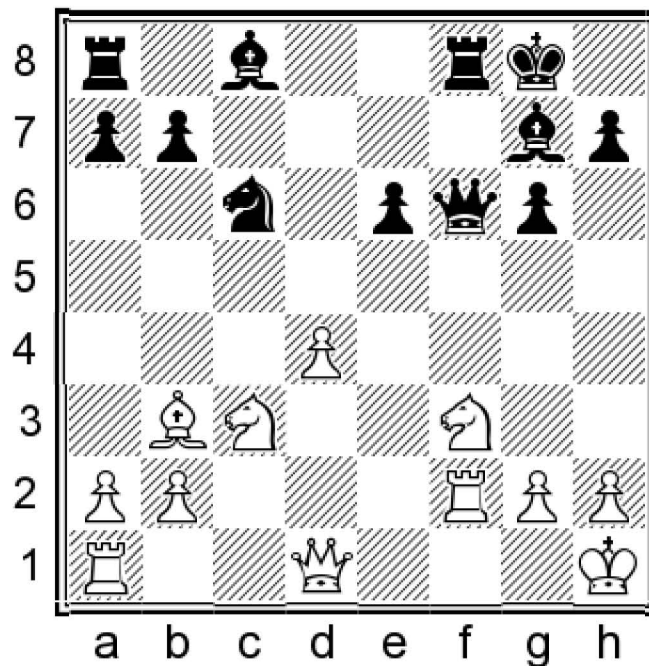


Position after: 19.Qxb3

At this stage 19...b6 20.Bg3 g5 21.Bxf4 gxf4 22.Rf2± was clearly better for White in Ottesen, S (2413) – Rain, R (2274) ICCF email 2011. A possible improvement is 19...Qd8 20.Be3 b6 but better check twice before trying it!

18.gxh3

18.Kh1 Is sufficient to maintain an approximate equality but without his dark-squared bishop White can hardly show more ambition. 18...Nxf2+ 19.Rxf2



Position after: 19.Rxf2

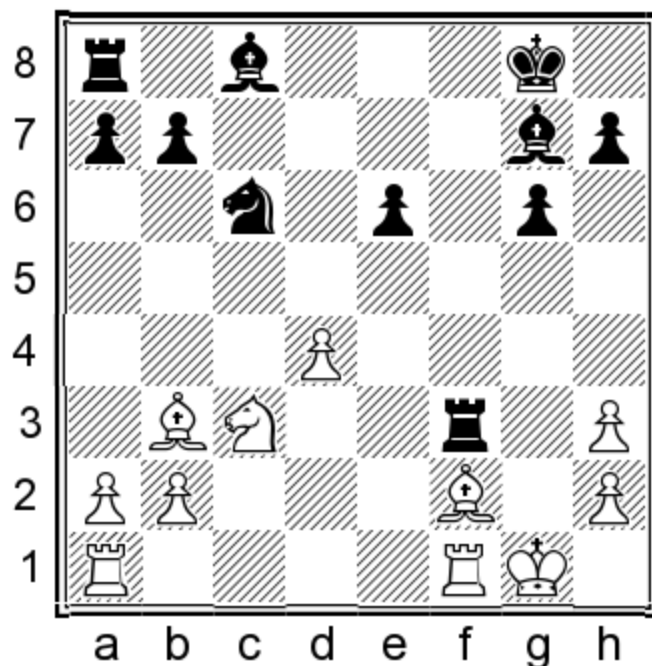
A) 19...Nxd4? This move appeared in Vestergard, S (2341) – Rain, R (2383) ICCF email 2005 and contradicts my previous note. I couldn't find any real improvement for Black on what follows: 20.Ne4 Qf4 21.Nxd4 Qxe4 22.Rxf8+ Bxf8 23.Rc1 Kh8 24.Nf3 Qf4 25.Rc4 Qf6 26.Rc7 b6 27.Ng5 Qxg5 28.Qd4+ e5 29.Qd5 Be6 30.Qxa8±. There is no joke on the first rank and Black didn't survive.

B) 19...Kh8 20.Ne4 Qe7 21.Qd2 Bd7∞ Litvinenko, N (2227) – Biedermann, T (2437) ICCF email 2012. In the event of the d4-pawn being traded for the one on e6 Black may just remain with the two bishops in an open position, provided a knight jump to g5 isn't a problem.

18...Qxf3 19.Qxf3 Rxf3

This last important position for the whole line has been debated quite a few times leading up to the final verdict being established: White's lead in

development compensates for his somewhat inferior pawn structure, but not more.



Position after: 19...Rxf3

20.Nb5

20.d5 Na5 is fine for Black and could transpose if White pushes 21.d5 in the main line, while after 20.Kg2?! Nxd4! intending 21.Rad1 Rf4 White has to fight for equality.

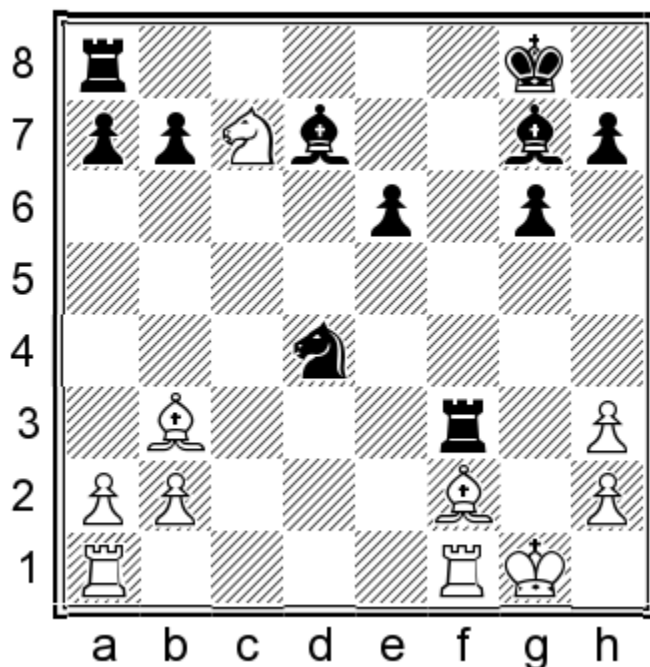
20...Bd7=

20...Kh8?! led to problems in the high-profile duel Sokolov, A (2635) – Timman, J (2630) Tilburg 1987: 21.Kg2 Rd3 22.Rad1 Rxd1 23.Rxd1 Bd7 24.Nc7 Rc8 25.Nxe6².

21.Nc7??

Now White's best seems 21.Rad1, when the most likely outcome is a draw. But a surprise may come, like in the following correspondence game.

21...Nxd4!μ



Position after: 21...Nxd4!μ

22.Rfd1

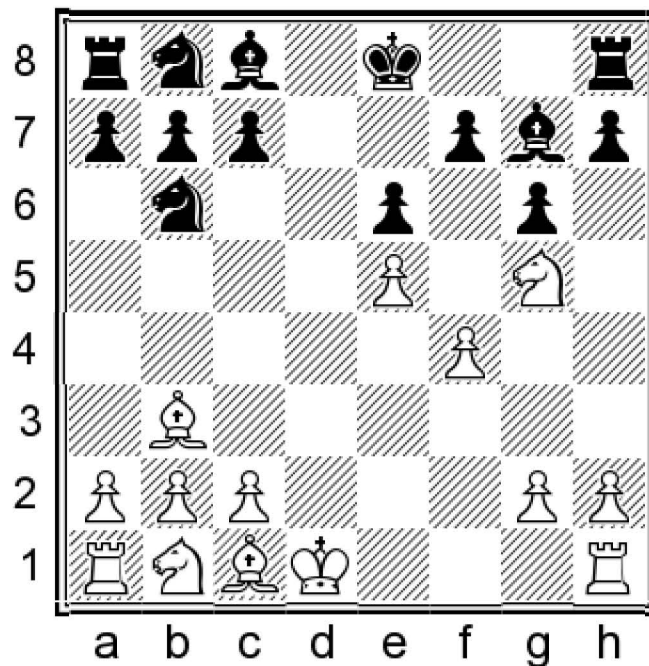
22.Nxa8 Ne2+ 23.Kg2 Rxb3 and the unexpected threat of ...Bc6 mate gives Black a decisive advantage.

22...Ne2+ 23.Kg2 Raf8 24.Bc5 Bc6 25.Bxe6+ R3f7+ 26.Bd5 Rc8

0-1 Gorge, E (2365) – Berriot, B (2395) France 2000.

g) 7.Ng5 e6 8.f4 dxe5 9.dxe5

1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.Nf3 g6 5.Bc4 Nb6 6.Bb3 Bg7 7.Ng5 e6 8.f4 dxe5 9.dxe5 Qxd1+ 10.Kxd1



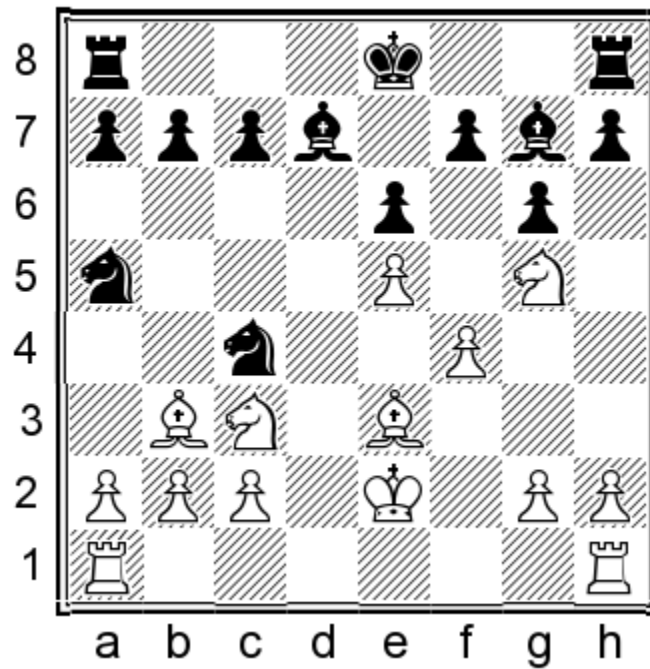
Position after: 10.Kxd1

Striving for this endgame where White enjoys a spatial advantage is far from stupid. Practice and some analysis show however that, contrary to GM John Shaw's assertion, Black has absolutely nothing to fear.

10...a5

10...Bd7 Shaw, in *Playing 1.e4! Volume 1*: "Should your opponent try something else, just play chess." An interesting comment from an author who produces mammoth books and seems ready to spend countless hours to find the most accurate lines. John Shaw has refined a few lines of the books I have written myself, and if I almost always agree with the fact he has improved on them, this is often connected with longer variations to memorize. In the present case 10...Bd7 is indeed Black's most popular choice but a couple of worthy alternatives exist, including "our" main line 10...a5. And it might have been easier to write this little sentence than to prove a white edge against them... 11.Nc3

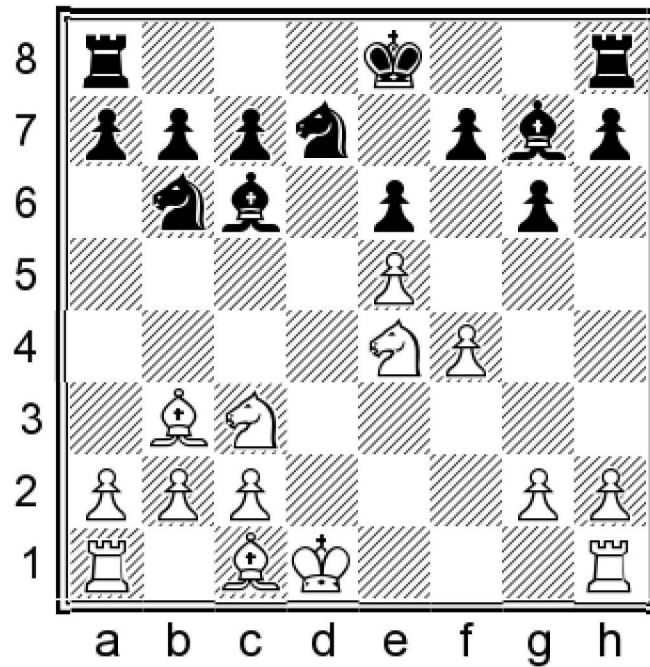
A) 11...Nc6 12.Be3 [trying to preserve the light-squared bishop by means of 12.a3? Nd4 13.Ba2 is optimistic to say the least: 13...Bc6μ.] 12...Na5 13.Ke2 Nbc4



Position after: 13...Nbc4

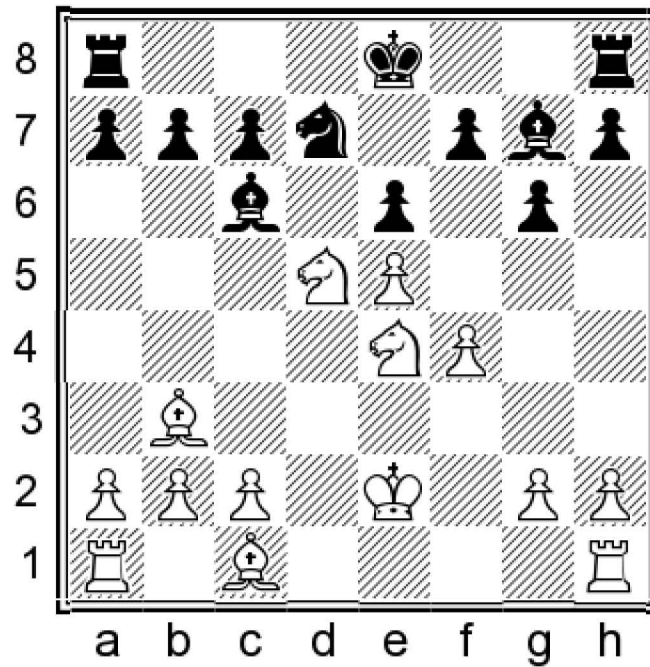
Kersten, U (2280) – Smolny, F (2161) Schwabisch Gmund 2017 is labelled as equal by the engine. White will lose the pair of bishops and it is indeed questionable whether his space advantage can outweigh this factor.

B) 11...Bc6 12.Nge4 N8d7



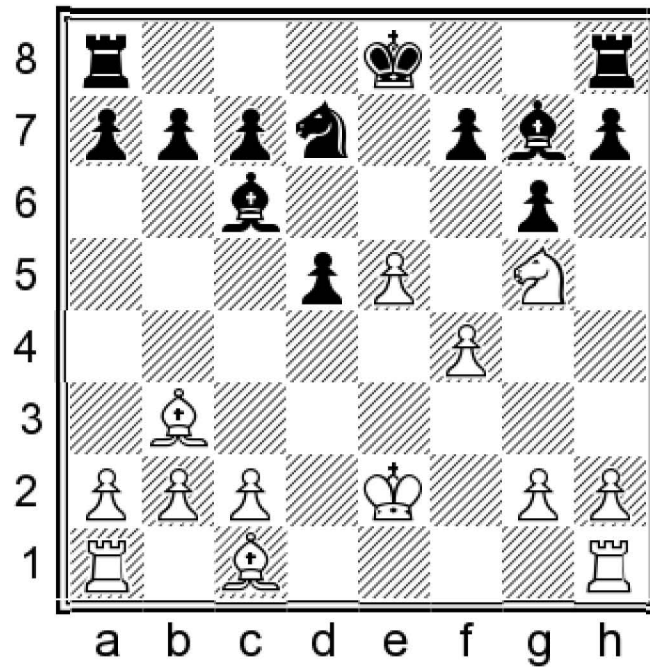
Position after: 12...N8d7

B1) 13.Ke2 This move is credited with an “!” by Shaw, but I am not convinced White really has something sizeable. 13...Nd5 [Black may wish to include 13...a5 14.a4 and then bounce 14...Nd5 but frankly I have no idea whom this will benefit in the end] 14.Nxd5



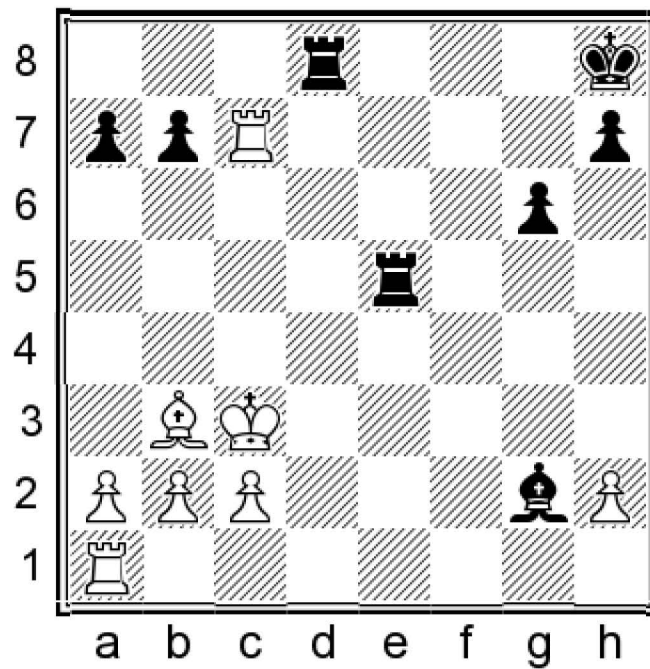
Position after: 14.Nxd5

14...exd5 [The recapture 14...Bxd5 is omitted by the Scottish GM. It may be the easiest path to equality, for instance 15.Bxd5 exd5 intending to follow up with ...f7-f6 as quickly as possible. 16.Ng5 0-0 17.Rd1 c6 18.Bd2 Rfe8 Ledger, A (2347) – Navarro Cia, M (2256) Daventry 2020 ended peacefully three moves later.] 15.Ng5 [15.Nc3 and now Shaw's suggested improvement on Mikulcik, L – Hudecek, J Czech Republic 1995, namely 15...0-0-0!, is unclear.]



Position after: 15.Ng5

Black has several possibilities at this juncture, 15...Nc5 and 15...0-0 being perhaps more to the point than Shaw's 15...h6. Here you have a sample line approved by the computer: 15...0-0 16.Be3 Rfe8 17.Rhd1 f6 18.Rxd5 fxg5 19.Rxd7+ Kh8 20.Rxc7 gxf4 21.Bxf4 Bxe5 22.Bxe5+ Rxe5+ 23.Kd2 Rd8+ 24.Kc3 Bxg2.

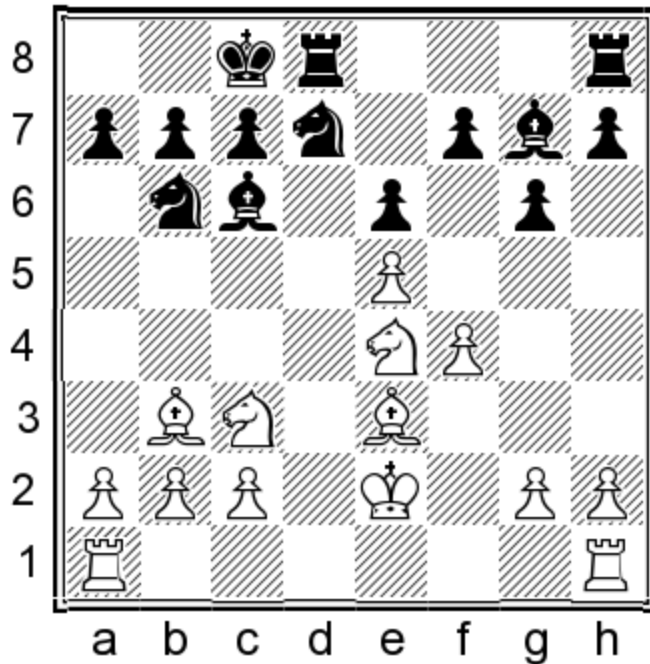


Position after: 24...Bxg2

The vacuum cleaner has passed over the board and while any result remains possible, this ending should be about equal.

B2) 13.Be3 0-0-0! from Rubinetti, J – Toth, C Buenos Aires 2000 is critical, as rightly indicated by Shaw who concludes that it's an unclear position. I do agree and would add that all roads lead to Rome then [White prevailed in Sutovsky, E (2657) – Reinderman, D (2573) Wijk aan Zee 2010 following 13...h6 14.Ke2 g5 15.g3 $\infty/2$ and he may

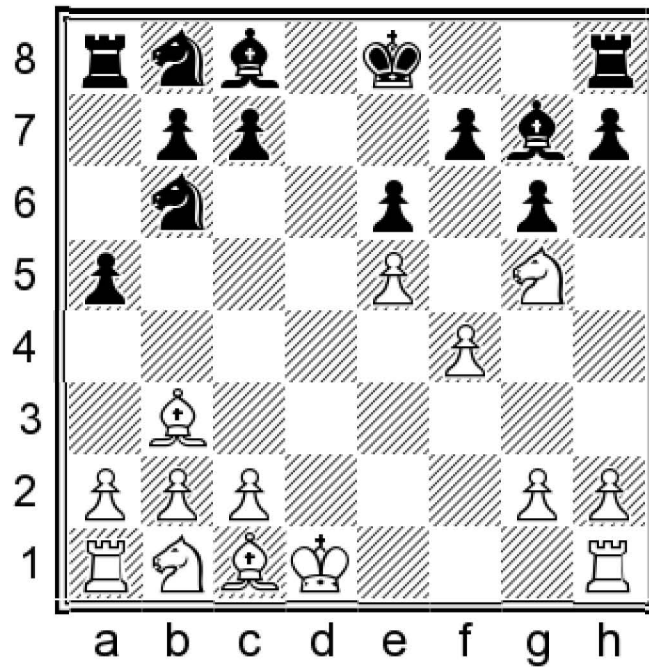
objectively stand slightly better there 15...Rh7]. After 14.Ke2,



Position after: 14.Ke2

besides the actual game continuation 14...Nd5, my computer claims that Black also gets his share of chances with either 14...Rde8 or 14...f6 15.Bxe6 Rhe8 16.Nc5 Bxg2=.

Back to 10...a5.



Position after: 10...a5

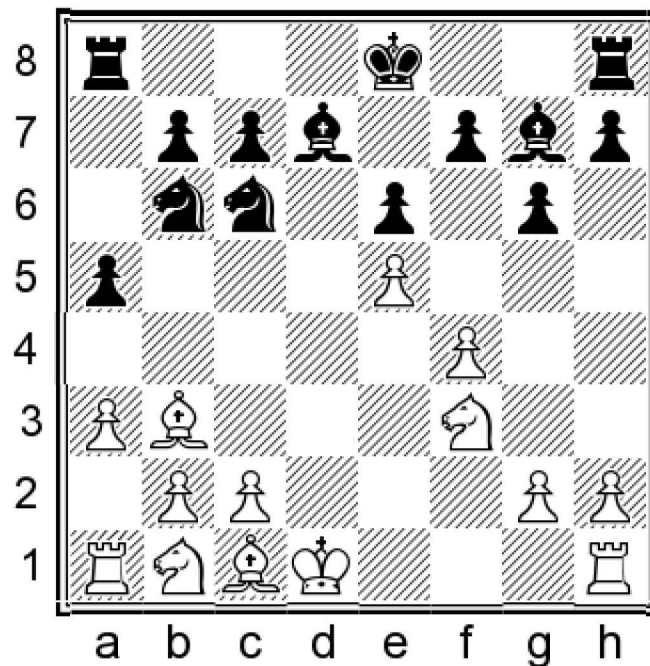
11.a3!

This is apparently White's best way to parry ...a5-a4 and maintain parity.

A) 11.c3?! Bd7 12.Bc2 h6 13.Nf3 Here or on the next move White might marginally improve but the position remains joyless for him. [13.Ne4!?]. 13...Bc6 14.Nbd2 [14.h4!?] 14...g5µ This evaluation from Kornev might be a bit optimistic, but clearly Black is pulling the strings here.

B) 11.a4?! Nd5 12.Ke2 b6 13.c4 Nb4 14.Nc3 Bb7 15.Rg1³ [15.Nge4 Nd7 16.Be3 f6³]

11...Nc6 12.Nf3 Bd7



Position after: 12...Bd7

Kornev judges this as slightly better for Black, and again this looks quite optimistic.

“Roughly equal” is more correct in my opinion, but at any rate both sides have their chances here.

13.Nc3 Ne7

13...a4 14.Ba2 Na5 15.Ke2 Bc6 16.Rd1 0-0 is balanced too.

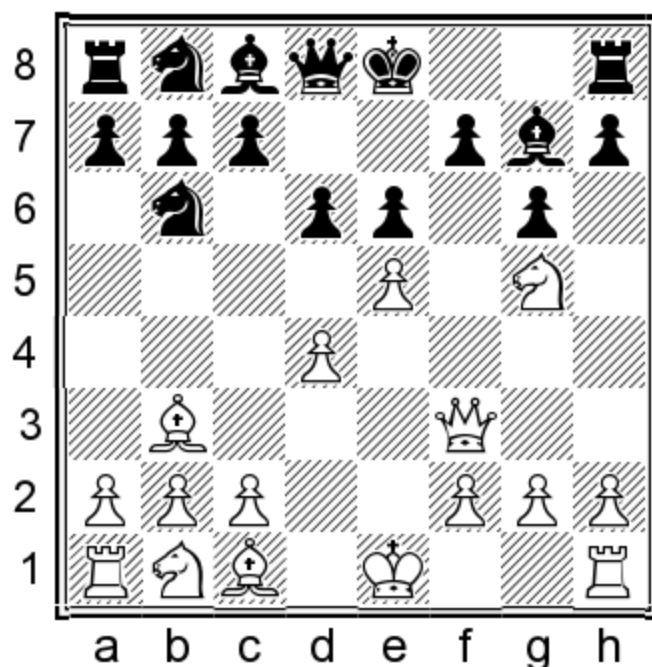
14.Ke2 a4 15.Ba2 Bc6 ∞

Conclusion: There is much less theory after the recapture 9.dxe5 and the queenless middlegame following 9...Qxd1+ 10.Kxd1 is full of life and opportunities for both sides to go wrong.

It may be a clever choice for White against tactically gifted opponents, but objectively the position is about equal.

h) 7.Ng5 e6 8.Qf3 Qd7, 8...0-0

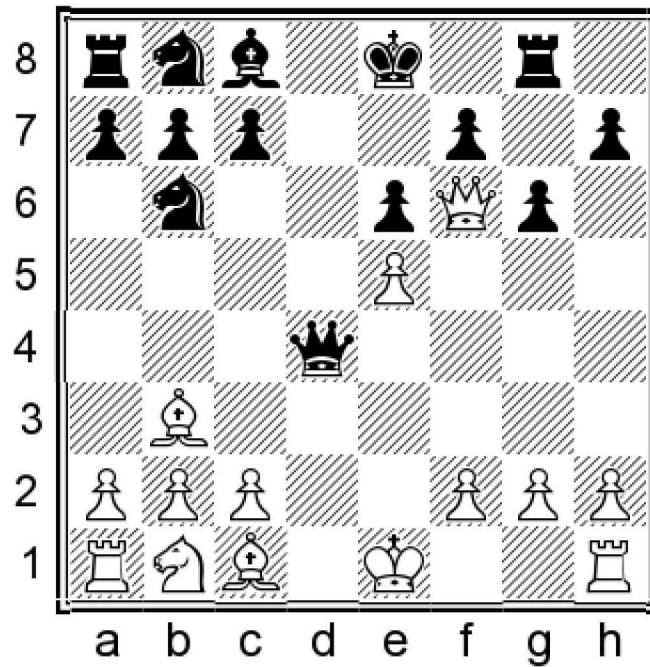
1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.Nf3 g6 5.Bc4 Nb6 6.Bb3 Bg7 7.Ng5 e6 8.Qf3



Position after: 8.Qf3

8...0-0!?

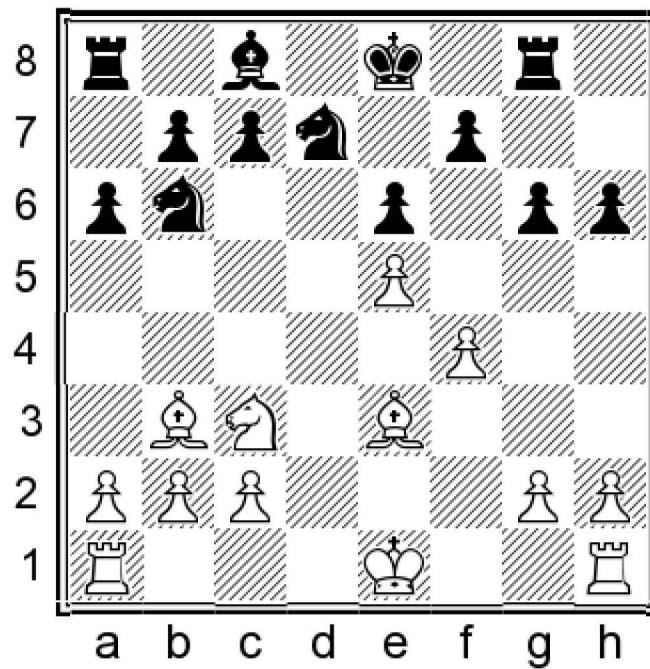
I was astonished to find out that my countrymen and theory experts Matthieu Cornette and Yannick Gozzoli have used the dubious 8...Qd7?! several times, and can only guess that they wanted to surprise their opponents. The main line then runs 9.Ne4 dxe5 10.Nf6+ [10.dxe5 from Van der Wiel, J – Hoeksema, H Eindhoven 1991 is also promising] 10...Bxf6 11.Qxf6 Rg8 12.dxe5 Qd4.



Position after: 12...Qd4

White should enjoy ample compensation on the dark squares if he loses his e-pawn, but he may not even need to sacrifice it.

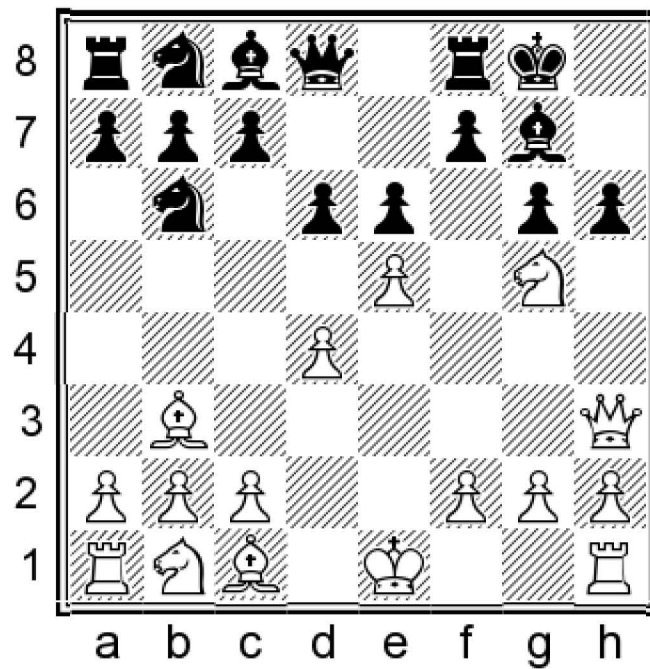
13.Nc3 N8d7 14.Qg5 [This is good enough to secure a substantial edge, but the engine suggests avoiding the trade of queens with 14.Qf3!?.] 14...h6 [14...Nxe5?? drops a full piece after 15.Be3 Qd6 16.Rd1+–; in the event of 14...Qxe5+ 15.Qxe5 Nxe5 16.Nb5± White will recover his pawn, develop his dark-squared bishop and possibly castle long.] 15.Qe3 Qxe3+ 16.Bxe3 a6 17.f4±



Position after: 17.f4±

Papdiamandis, E (2269) – Gozzoli, Y (2600) Europe-Echecs blitz 2020;
despite the big gap between the respective levels of the belligerents Black
was not able to survive.

9.Qh3 h6



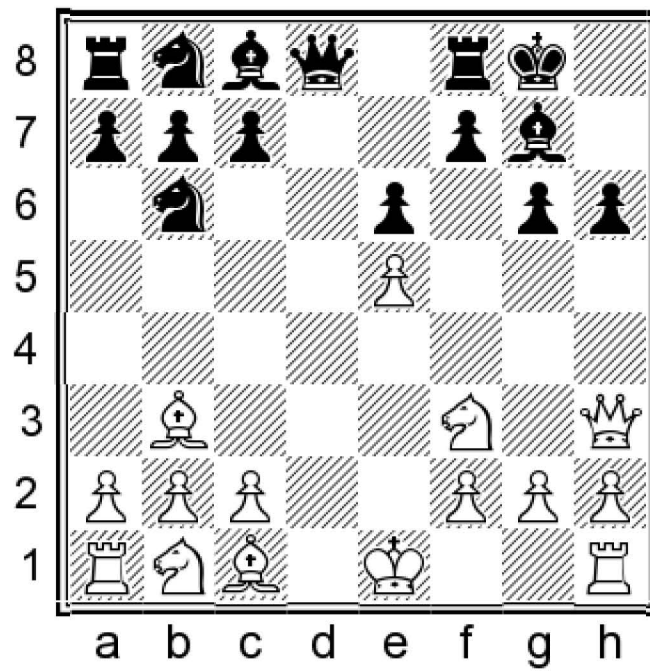
Position after: 9...h6

10.Nf3

Kornev stops here with the verdict ².

10.Ne4 is also worth of consideration. 10...dxe5 [10...d5 11.Nc5 Kh7 makes sense too. Black will then repel the knight from c5 and prepare the ...c7-c5 thrust.] 11.dxe5 Qd4 and now either 12.Nbc3 or 12.Nf6+ Bxf6 13.exf6 looks a bit better for White, but any outcome remains possible.

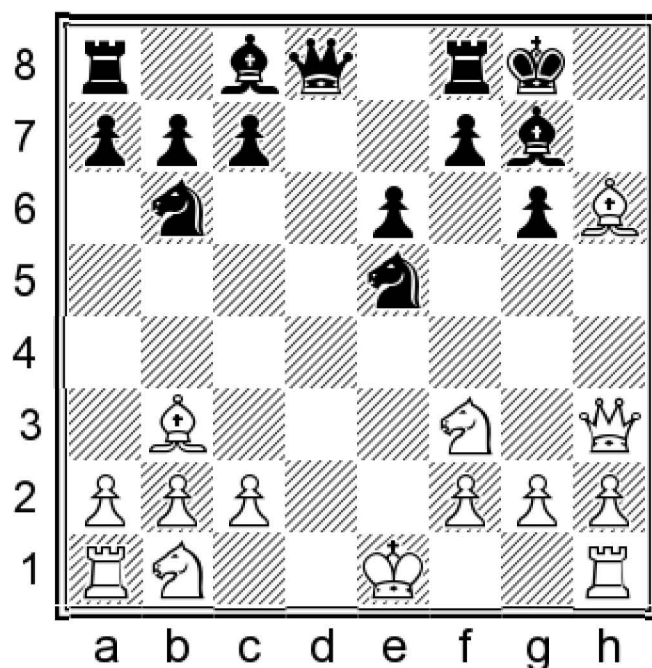
10...dxe5 11.dxe5



Position after: 11.dxe5

11...c5

11...Nc6 doesn't bring full equality either: 12.Bxh6 Nxe5



Position after: 12...Nxe5

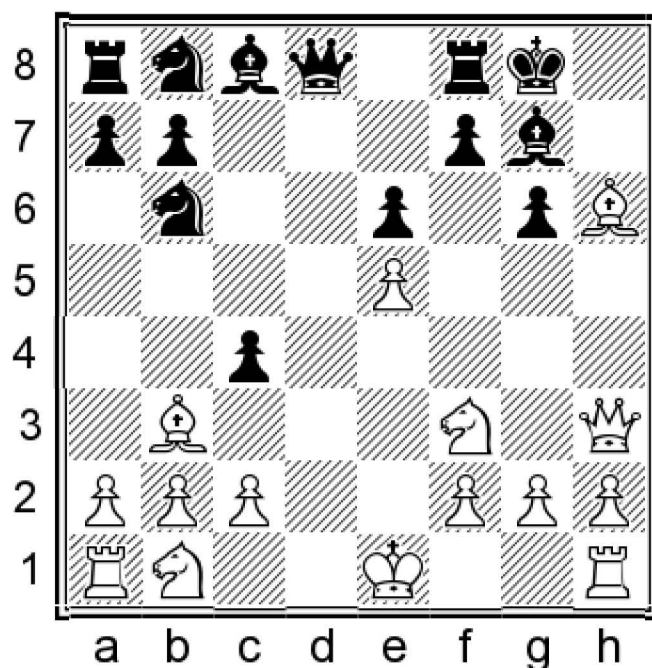
13.Ng5 [or 13.Nxe5 Bxe5 14.Nc3² Shamkovich, L (2495) – Alburt, L (2575) South Bend 1981] 13...Qd4 [13...Nd3+?! proved too risky in Nisipeanu, D – Reinderman, D Rijeka 2010 14.cxd3 Bxb2 15.Nd2 Bxa1 16.0-0,] 14.Bxg7 Kxg7² Hamann, H (2306) – Rain, R (2251) ICCF email 2018.

Back to 11...c5.

This position is critical for the assessment of 8...0-0. Beside 12.Na3, 12.c3 and 12.c4, all addressing the threat of ...c5-c4 and leading to a complex middlegame with reciprocal chances, White has also gone for blood with 12.Bxh6

which clearly represents an attempt at refuting the line.

12...c4



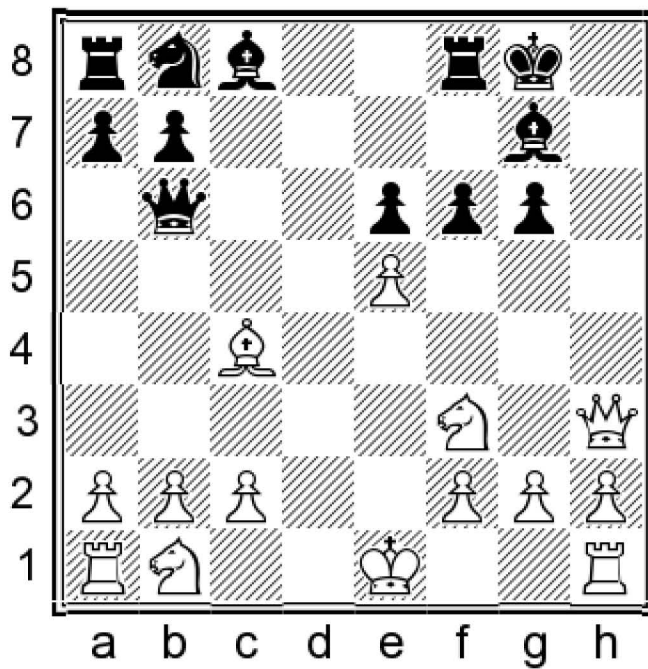
Position after: 12...c4

13.Be3!

The primitive 13.Ng5? brought White a lightning victory in Bortnyk, O (2552) – Wisniewski, M (2306) Lvov 2015, but objectively it is wrong: 13...Bxe5 14.Nd2. Now instead of 14...Bf4?? 15.Nde4 with a large plus for White, the materialistic 14...cxb3! would have been much better for Black after 15.Nde4 Re8 or 15.Bg7 Kxg7 16.Qh7+ Kf6–+.

13...N8d7

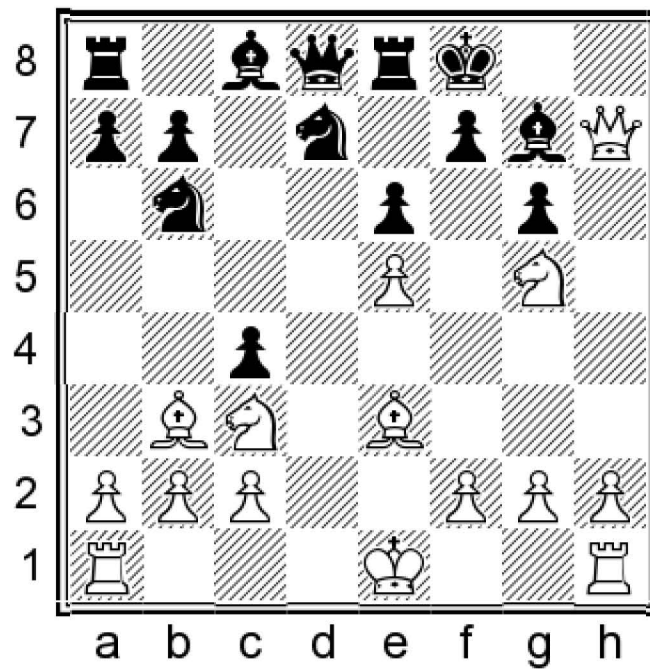
This move is given by C&K, with the aim of covering the c5-square. 13...f6? 14.Bxb6 Qxb6 15.Bxc4± A quick debacle for Black ensued in Moiseenko, V (2543) – Peng, L (2465) Heraklio 2019:



Position after: 15.Bxc4±

15...Qxb2 16.Bxe6+ Bxe6 17.Qxe6+ Kh7 [17...Kh8 18.0-0 Qxa1 19.Qb3 Rc8 20.c4 wouldn't have saved Black] 18.0-0 Qxa1 19.Qb3 Nc6 20.Nc3 Qxf1+ 21.Kxf1 Nxe5 22.Nxe5 fxe5 23.Ne4 b6 24.Ng5+ Kh6 25.Ne6 Rf5 26.g4 1-0.

14.Ng5 Re8 15.Qh7+ Kf8 16.Nc3

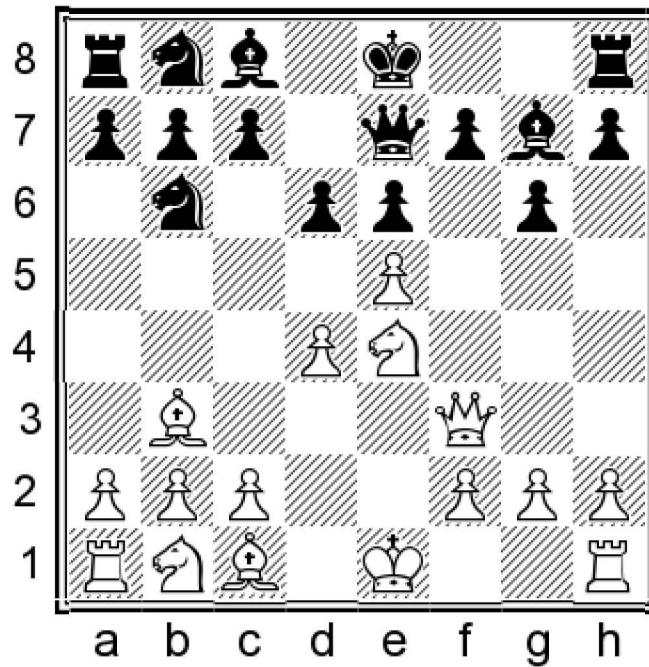


Position after: 16.Nc3

The position is quite delicate to handle for Black, but only a deep analysis can tell whether he survives or not.

i) 7.Ng5 e6 8.Qf3 Qe7

1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.Nf3 g6 5.Bc4 Nb6 6.Bb3 Bg7 7.Ng5 e6 8.Qf3 Qe7 9.Ne4

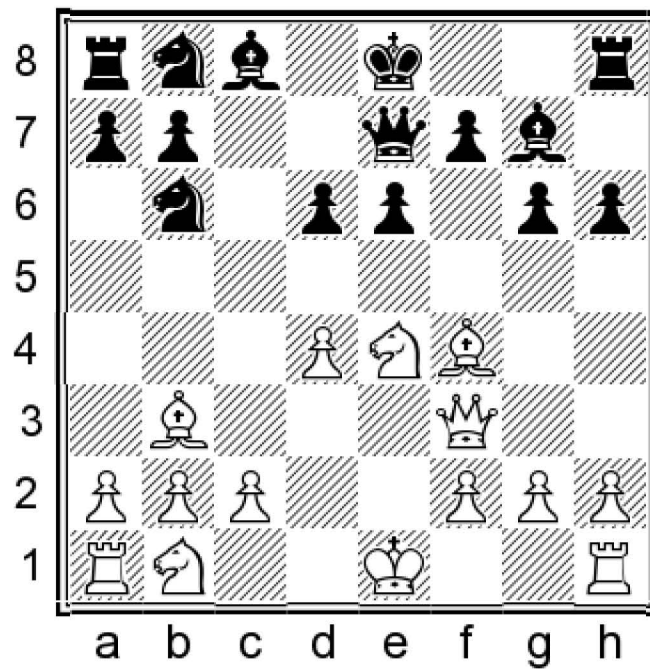


Position after: 9.Ne4

9...dxe5

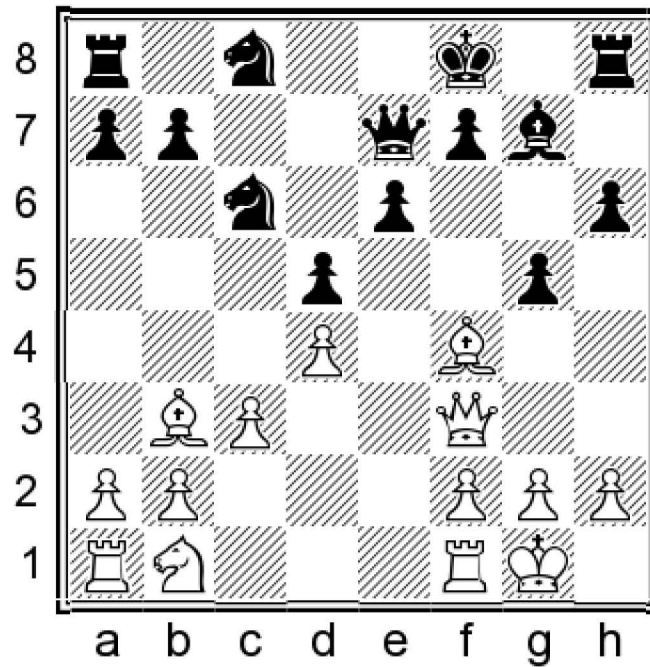
The vast majority of the games follows this path but stopping Bg5 with 9...h6!? has proven quite playable too. Some fresh examples: **A)** 10.Bf4 Nc6 [or 10...dxe5 11.Bxe5 f5 Das, A – Pijpers, A Leiden 2019, which is about equal too] 11.exd6 Nxd4 12.dxe7?! [12.Qg3! keeps the balance] 12...Nxf3+ 13.gxf3 Bxb2 14.Nbc3 Bxa1 15.Be5 f5 16.Bxh8 fxe4³ Pourramezanali, A (2528) – Firouzja, A (2618) Bushehr 2019.

B) 10.exd6! This capture seems to give White a small edge. 10...cxd6 11.Bf4



Position after: 11.Bf4

11...d5 [11...e5?? is just bad: 12.dxe5 dxe5 13.Be3 (threatening 14.Bc5) 13...f5 14.Qg3! fxe4 15.Qxg6+ Kd8 16.Nc3+- and the black monarch will have a hard time] 12.Nd6+ Kf8 13.c3 Nc6 [13...h5!? appeared in the online rapid game Grischuk, A (2777) – Dubov, D (2699) Chess24 2020; it neither changes the evaluation, nor really discourages White from castling kingside] 14.0-0 g5 15.Nxc8 Nxc8² [or 15...Rxc8!??].

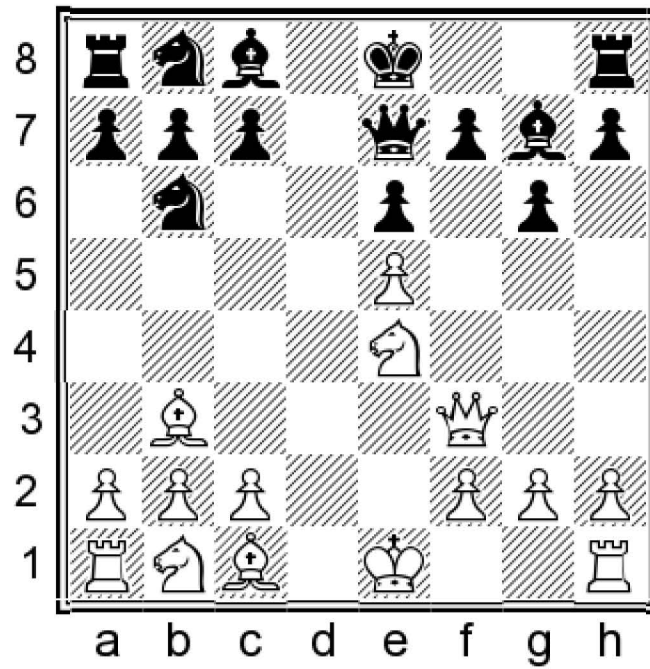


Position after: 15...Nxc8²

Roesch M, H (2410) – Pavlov, V (2415) ICCF email 2018. Black has a sound position except for his expanded kingside, which will require attention from both sides.

10.Bg5

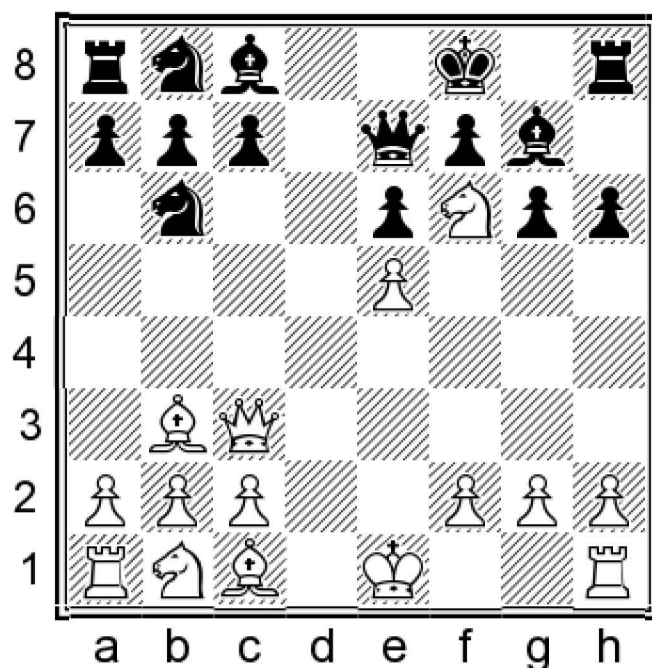
The position after 10.dxe5



Position after: 10.dxe5

has mostly been discussed in correspondence chess, with Black achieving decent results.

A) 10...h6 11.Nf6+ Kf8 12.Qc3.



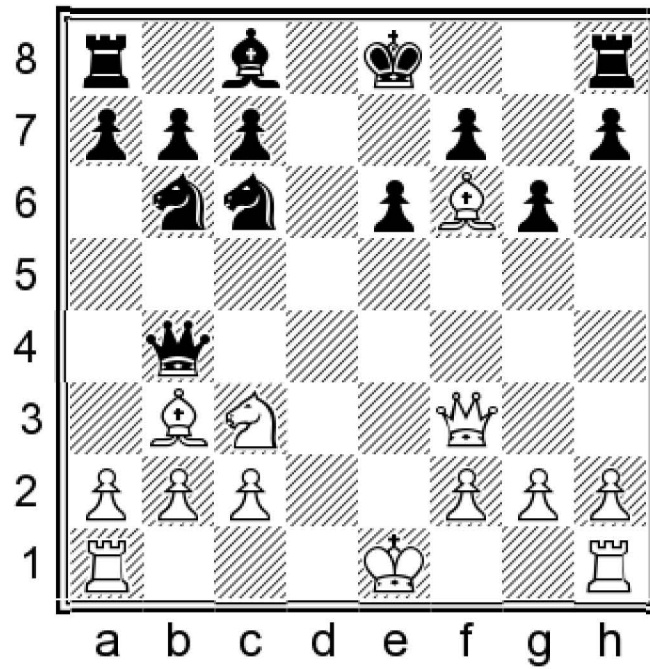
Position after: 12.Qc3

This position is a curiosity in the sense that Black has only tried knight moves here, but five different ones! I prefer White a bit in all cases, but the position offers mutual chances. For instance: 12...Nc6 [12...N6d7 13.Qxc7 Nc6² Van Leeuwen, E (2486) – Schmidt, L (2402) ICCF email 2016; 12...Nd5 13.Bxd5 exd5 14.Be3 Na6[∞] Sobirey, M (2324) – Ottesen, S (2356) email 2017] 13.Be3 Nd7 14.Nxd7+ Qxd7 15.f4 Ne7 Lupo, A (2282) – Reichert, T (2338) ICCF email 2016 or 15...b6 Heydt, H (2273) – Pavlov, V (2427) ICCF email 2017.

B) 10...Nc6?! is apparently inferior. 11.Bg5 Qb4+ [11...Nxe5? 12.Qf4± followed by 13.Nf6+.] 12.Nbc3

B1) 12...Nd7 13.0-0-0 Ndxe5 14.Qg3 yielded White a huge initiative in Pekin, T (2366) – Rain, R (2251) ICCF email 2018.

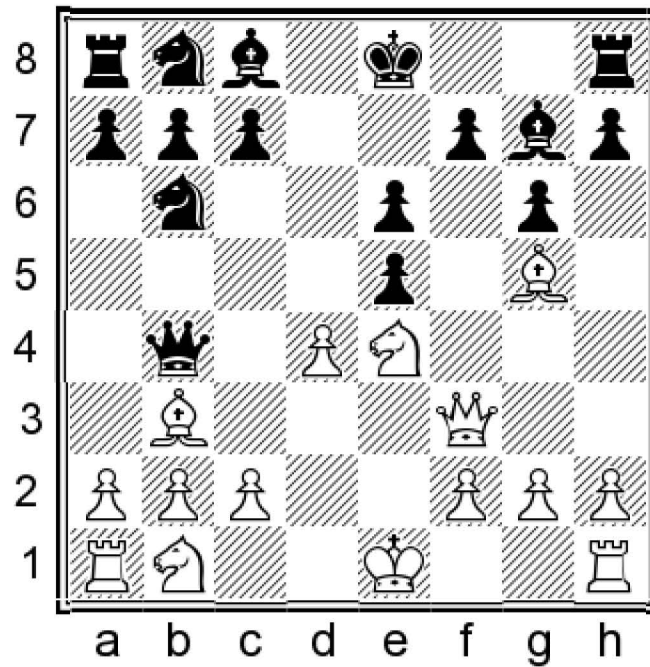
B2) 12...Bxe5 13.Nf6+ Bxf6 14.Bxf6 This also looks pretty dangerous for the second player.



Position after: 14.Bxf6

14...0-0 15.a3 [15.0-0-0!?] 15...Qa5 16.0-0-0 Qf5 17.Qxf5 exf5 18.Nb5
Bd7 19.Nxc7 White retained a sizeable advantage in the ending,
Legemaat, G (2331) – Rain, R (2253) ICCF email 2017.

10...Qb4+

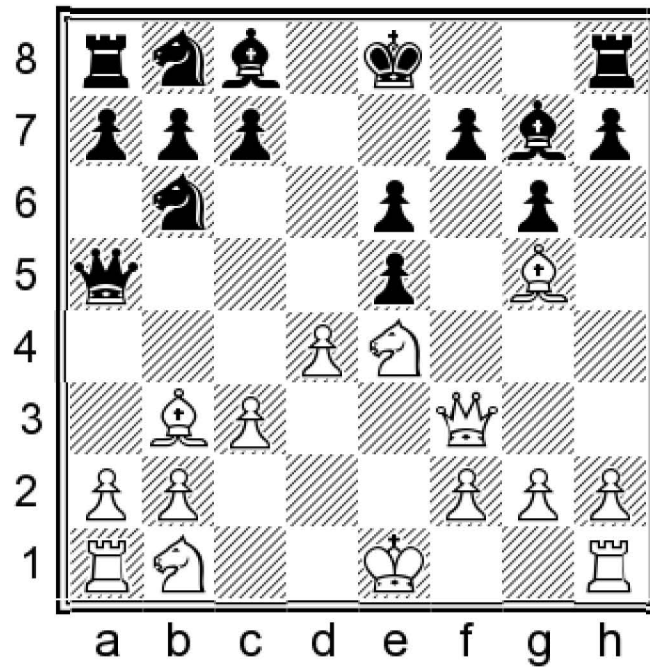


Position after: 10...Qb4+

11.c3

11.Bd2!? Qxd4 12.c3 Qd7 13.Nf6+ Bxf6 14.Qxf6 Rg8 15.Qxe5 Qd6
16.Qe2 White had adequate compensation due to his opponent's weak dark squares, Bulgarini Torres, M (2281) – Rain, R (2227) ICCF email 2017.

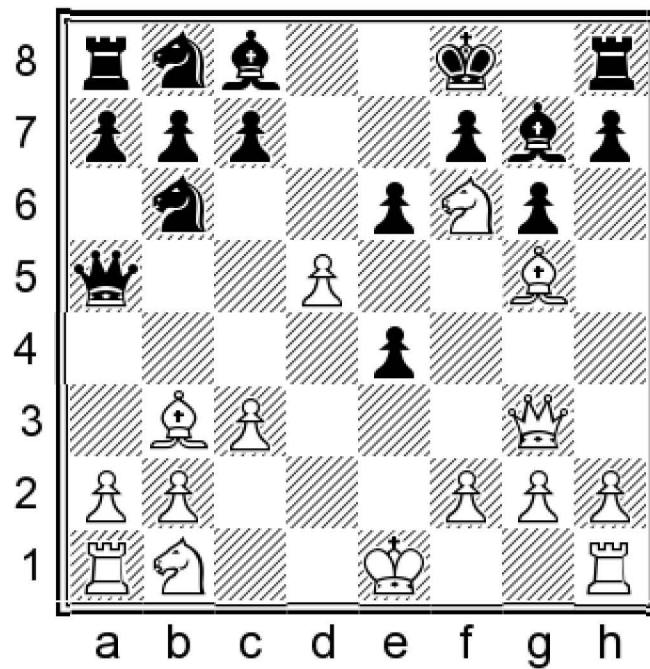
11...Qa5



Position after: 11...Qa5

12.Bf6

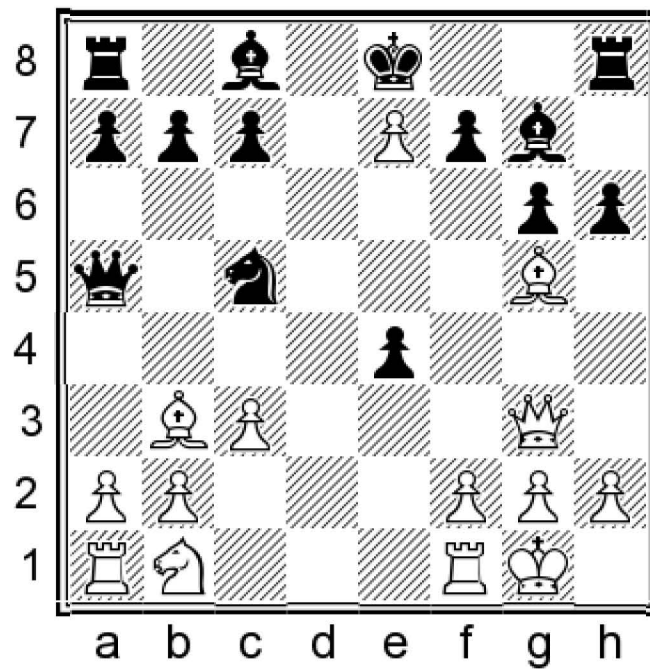
A) The venomous 12.Nf6+!/?/?! is quite rare, appearing in only 15% of the games. Its critical follow-up is 12...Kf8 13.d5 e4 14.Qg3. [Given the awkward placement of the black king, White also enjoys some compensation if he opts for 14.Nxe4!? exd5 15.Bf4, when the horse is immune in view of Bd6+. Gobbling the e-pawn with the queen is, on the other hand, a serious mistake since after 14.Qxe4 h6! 15.Bh4 g5 White loses material.]



Position after: 14.Qg3

A1) 14...Nxd5? 15.Bxd5 Na6 [or 15...exd5 16.b4!+–, with either 17.Qxc7 or 17.Nxd5 next.] 16.Bxe4 h6 17.Qd3 Black threw in the towel in Degraeve, J (2480) – Santo Roman, M (2455) Strasbourg 1992.

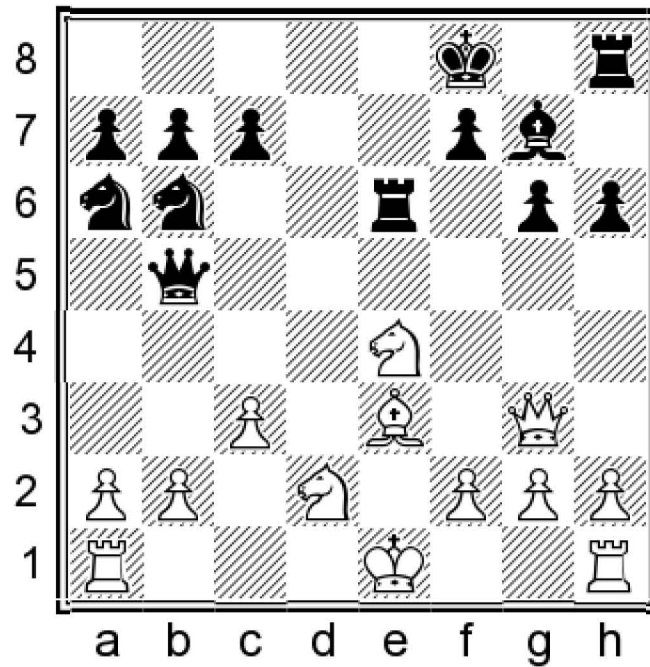
A2) 14...N6d7?! 15.Nxd7+ Nxd7 16.dxe6 Nc5 17.e7+ Ke8 18.0-0 h6



Position after: 18...h6

This occurred in the old game Short, N (2535) – Alburt, L (2535) Foxboro 1985, where rather than 19.Bf4 White should have preferred 19.Be3! Nxb3 20.axb3 Qe5 21.Bf4 Qxe7 22.Bxc7 with a neat plus.

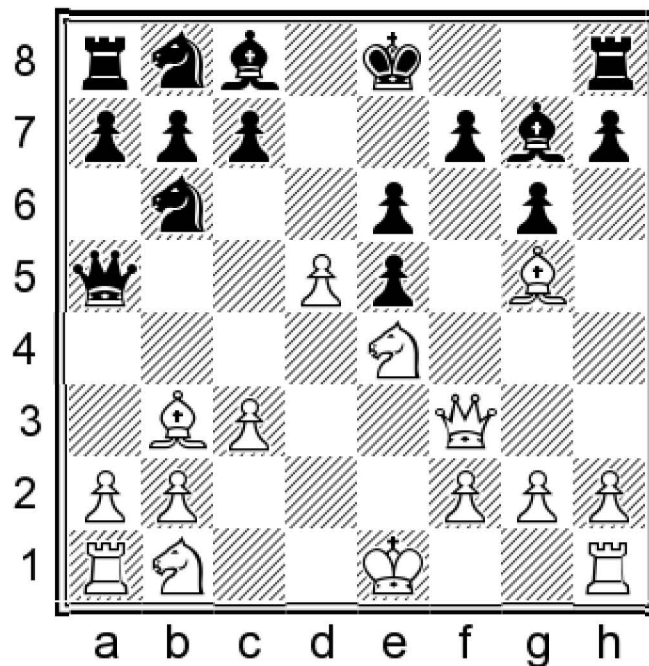
A3) 14...Na6! 15.dxe6 Bxe6 16.Bxe6 h6! 17.Nxe4 Re8 18.Be3 Rxe6 19.Nbd2 Qb5!



Position after: 19...Qb5!

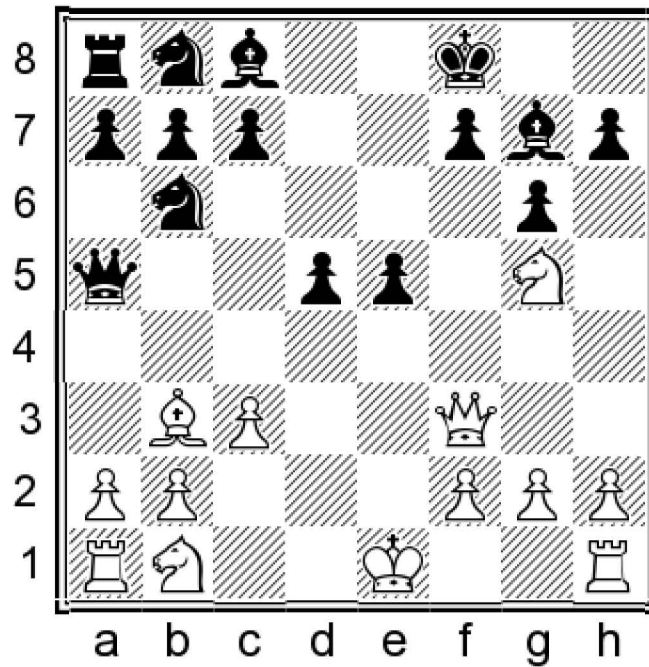
Atakisi, U (2337) – Rain, R (2371) ICCF email 2005. Black has prevented kingside castling and stands better. This line is, however, quite tricky and White can diverge with 15.Qe5, 17.Qf4 and 17.Bh4 g5 18.Nh5, when Black may not be more than OK in a complicated tactical melee.

B) Despite the fact that it has been tried only four times, the push 12.d5!? also deserves serious attention.



Position after: 12.d5!?

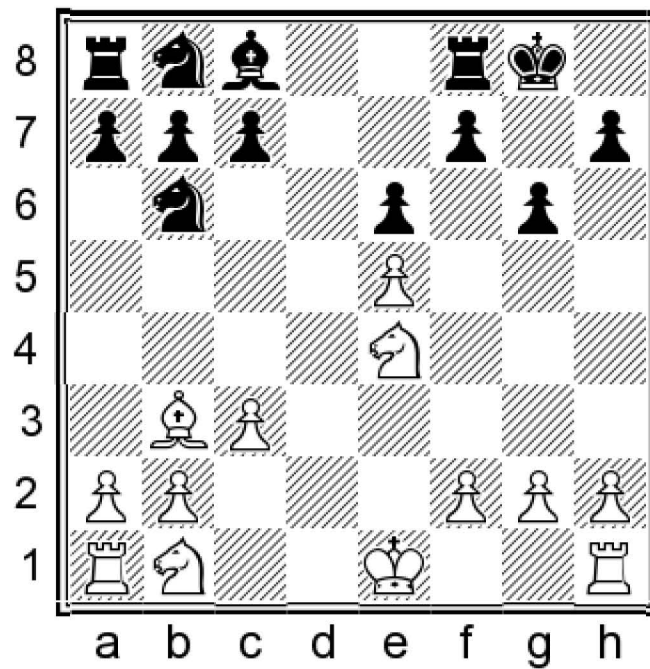
- B1)** 12...exd5? already leaves Black struggling after 13.Nf6+ Kf8 14.Nxd5 and now Nikolova, A (2332) – Azimova, K (2051) Vratsa 2015 didn't last much longer: 14...Nxd5 15.Bxd5 f5 16.Bxb7 e4 17.Qd1 Bxb7 18.Qd8+ and Black resigned in view of the imminent mate.
- B2)** Capturing 12...Nxd5!? leads on the other hand to a nebulous position following 13.Bxd5 exd5 14.Nf6+ Kf8 15.b4 Qa4 16.Nxd5 h6∞.
- B3)** 12...0-0 White now has a choice between two different approaches.
- B3.1)** The positional 13.dxe6 Bxe6 14.Bxe6 fxe6 15.Qg4 Rf5 was played in the stem game Fishbein, A – Alburt, L Philadelphia 1988; White has obvious compensation for the pawn but probably not more.
- B3.2)** The materialistic choice is 13.Be7 exd5! [13...Re8? 14.Bb4 Qb5 15.Na3 Qd7 16.dxe6 is visibly less appealing for Black, though not completely over yet] 14.Bxf8 Kxf8 15.Ng5.



Position after: 15.Ng5

Now we have a further split: 15...f6 [15...f5 16.Nxh7+ Kg8 17.Ng5 N8d7∞ Figueredo Company, J (2174) – Ramos Verdu, J (2089) ICCF email 2013] 16.Nxh7+ Ke7 17.h4 [17.Nd2!?] 17...Nc6 Bulgarini Torres, M (2126) – Ramponelli, R (2060) LSS email 2014. In both cases the situation is difficult to assess and the game probably balanced. Personally I quite like Black's potential linked with his strong center.

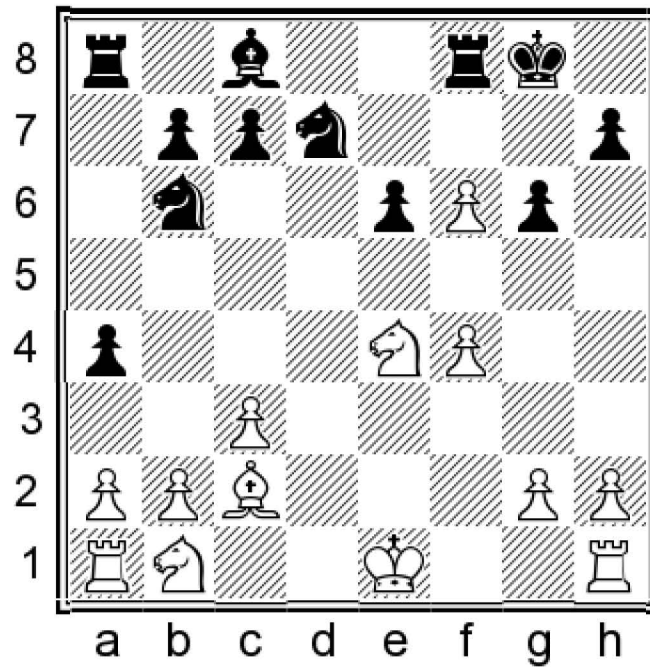
12...Bxf6 13.Qxf6 0-0 14.Qxe5 Qxe5 15.dxe5



Position after: 15.dxe5

15...Bd7

15...a5 is good too. 16.f4 [or 16.Nbd2 a4 17.Bc2 N8d7 18.f4 Nd5=
 Vokhidov, S (2494) – Fier, A (2551) Toshkent 2019] 16...a4 17.Bc2 f5
 18.exf6 N8d7



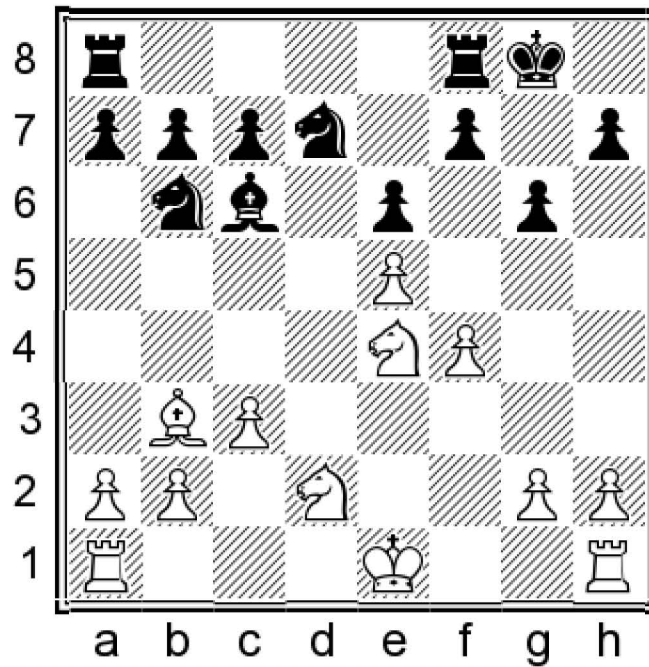
Position after: 18...N8d7

Beer, D (2077) – Frotscher, T (2388) ICCF email 2019. Black will eliminate the intruder on f6 and then possibly prepare the break ...e6-e5.

16.Nbd2 Bc6

16...a5!?

17.f4 N8d7



Position after: 17...N8d7

Reyes Maldonado, C (2372) – Rain, R (2240) ICCF email 2017.

Black has located his bishop on a nice diagonal and he has at his disposal many moves to improve his position: ...Kg7, ...a7-a5, ...Bd5 or ...Nd5. The endgame is about equal.

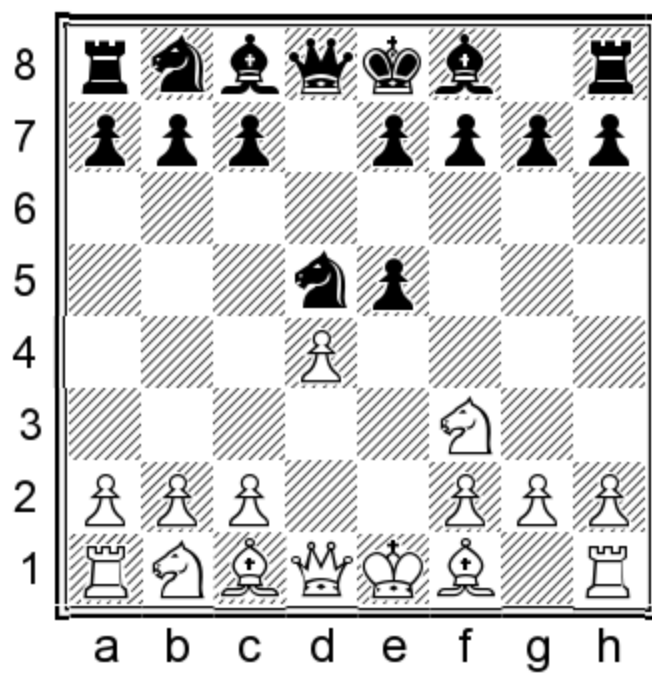
Conclusion: Black has some ways to deviate from the mainstream 8.Qf3 Qe7 9.Ne4 dxe5 and so on if he wants to explore less trodden territories, but this has undoubtedly proved the safest choice for him.

Most of the games then lead to an endgame where White's space advantage confers on him a plus, but only one of an academic nature.

Chapter 8

Modern Variation with 4...dxe5

1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.Nf3 dxe5



Chapter Guide

Chapter 8 – Modern Variation with 4...dxe5

1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.Nf3 dxe5 5.Nxe5

a) 5.c4, 5.dxe5 alternatives b) 5...e6, 5...Bf5

c) 5...Nd7

d) 5...c6 6.Bd3 (Correspondence Practice) e) 5...c6 6.Be2 (Correspondence Practice) f) 5...c6 6.Bc4 (Correspondence Practice) g) 5...c6 6.Bd3 (Over the Board Practice) h) 5...c6 6.Bc4 (Over the Board Practice) i) 5...c6 6.Be2 Nd7 (Over the Board Practice) j) 5...c6 6.Be2 Bf5 7.0-0 Nd7 8.-- (Over the Board Practice) k) 5...c6 6.Be2 Bf5 7.0-0 Nd7 8.Nf3 (Over the Board Practice) l) 5...g6 6.h3, 6.Qf3

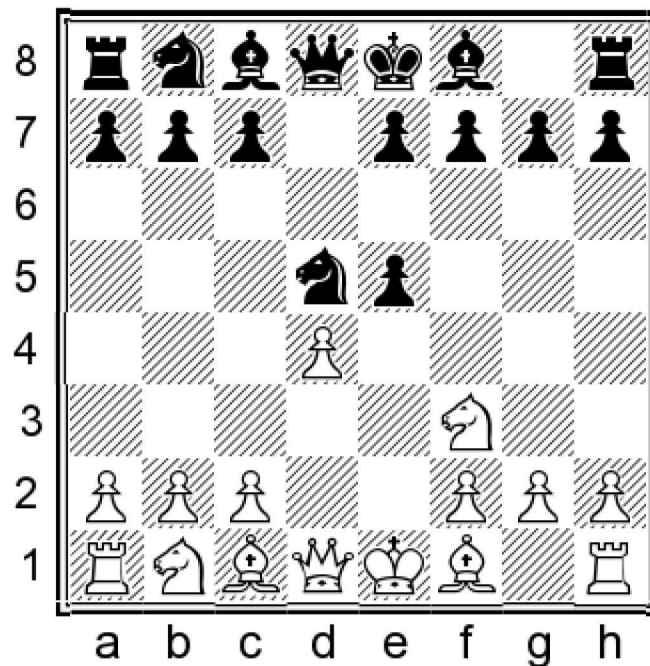
m) 5...g6 6.c4 Nb6 7.Be3, 7.c5

n) 5...g6 6.c4 Nb6 7.Nc3

o) 5...g6 6.Bc4

a) 5.c4, 5.dxe5 alternatives

1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.Nf3 dxe5



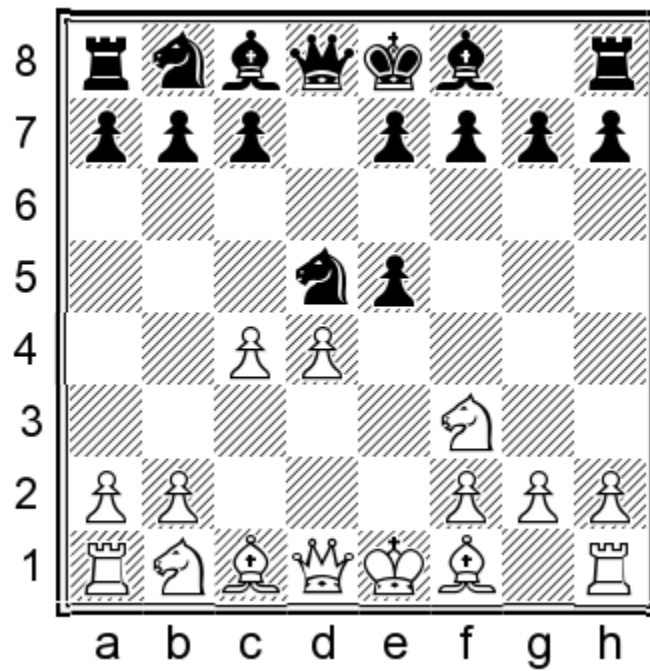
Position after: 4...dxe5

This position has been reached about 6500 times in my database, with White opting for 5.Nxe5 in about 90 percent of those games.

5.dxe5

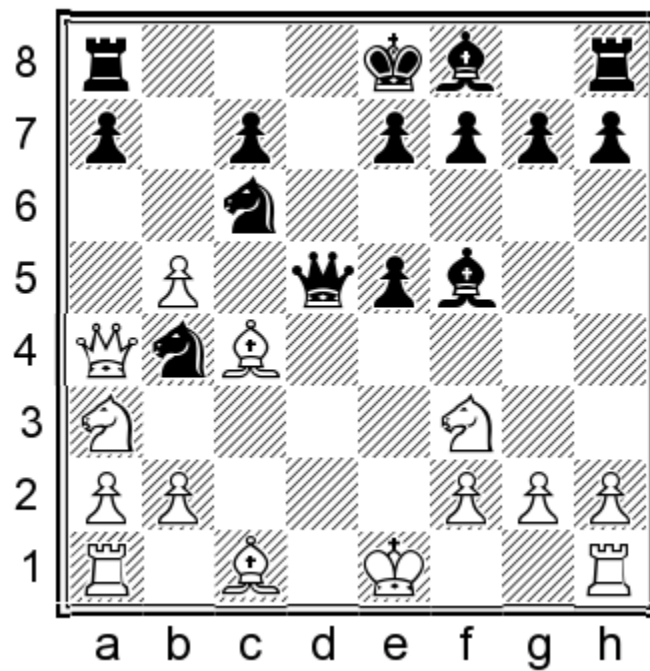
The pawn capture appears in almost 400 instances, with the main line running then 5...Bg4 6.h3 Bxf3 7.Qxf3 e6. We will briefly discuss how both sides can deviate from that path.

5.c4!? This move was used in fewer than 40 games, so C&K can be forgiven for not talking about it. It is in my view a quite clever choice, both as an attempt at an opening edge and to limit the opponent's possibilities: White spares himself the study of the whole 5.Nxe5 c6 branch!



Position after: 5.c4!?

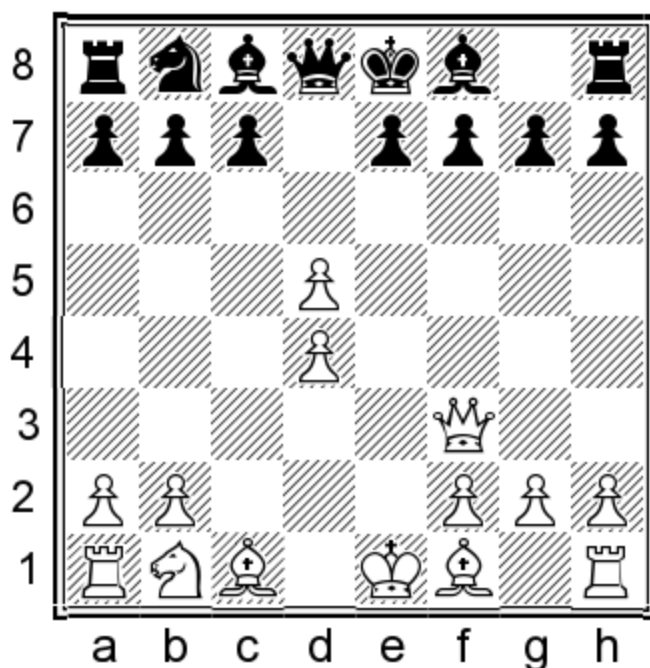
A) 5...Nb4?? 6.Qa4+ N8c6 7.d5 b5 is a bit tricky but ends up badly for Black after 8.cxb5 Bf5 9.Na3 Qxd5 10.Bc4!



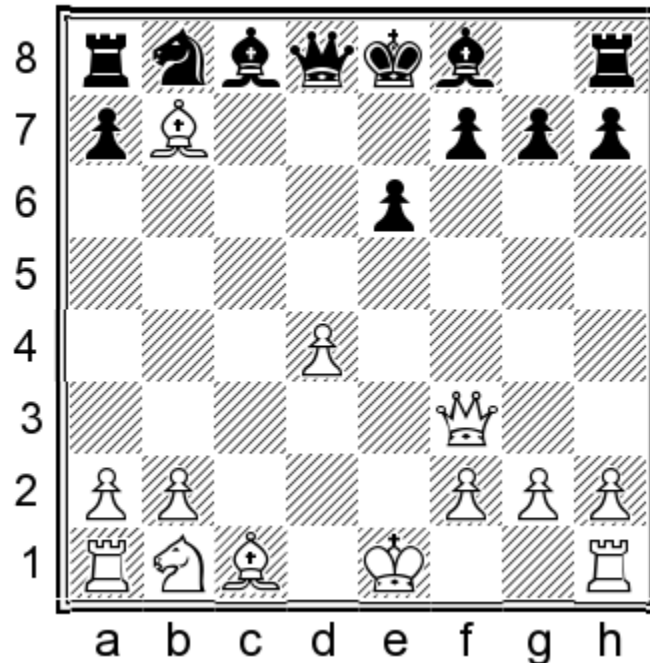
Position after: 10.Bc4!

10...Nd3+ [or 10...Qe4+ 11.Kf1±] 11.Bxd3 Bxd3 12.bxc6 e6 13.Nb1!±.
White is a bit annoyed by the fact that he can't castle, but the extra piece should prevail in the long run.

B) 5...e4 6.cxd5 exf3 7.Qxf3 Black can now try to get rid of the irritating d5-pawn by means of ...c6, or else opt for an approach based on a kingside fianchetto. In practice both options have failed to bring him parity.



B3) 7...c6 8.Bc4! cxd5 9.Bxd5 e6 Having said “A”, Black must say “B” and sacrifice his b7-pawn. 10.Bxb7

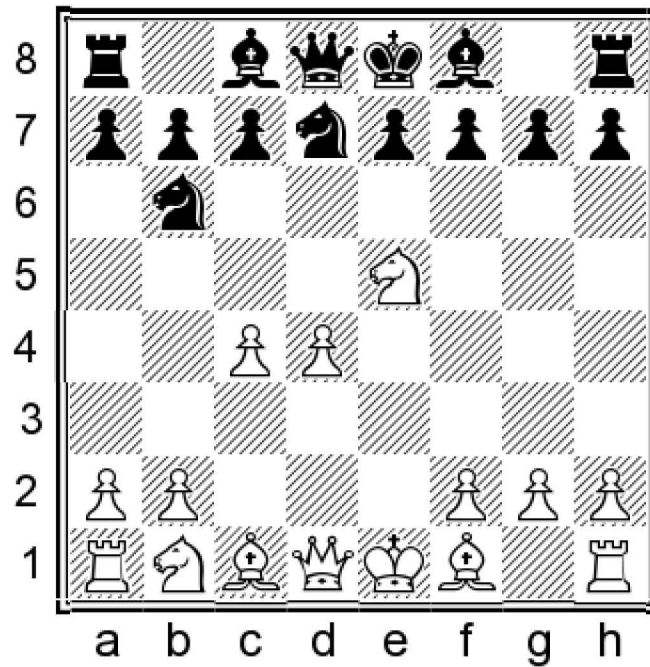


Position after: 10.Bxb7

10...Qc7 [10...Bxb7 11.Qxb7 Nd7 could be the lesser evil: Black has a nice outpost for his knight at d5 but this clearly doesn't compensate for the lost pawn.] 11.Bxa8! [The mistake 11.Bxc8? was played in Sutovsky, E (2696) – Finkel, A (2499) Israel 2012 and diametrically changed the assessment of the position. Following 11...Qxc1+ 12.Ke2 Black should have continued 12...Qxh1! 13.Qxa8 Bd6 with ...0-0 next and a large advantage, based on the precarious placement of the white monarch and the pinned b1-knight.] 11...Qxc1+ 12.Qd1 Qxb2 13.0-0 Qxa1 Now either 14.Qb3 or 14.Qd2 gives White a decisive plus because he has trapped the enemy queen.

C) 5...Nb6 6.Nxe5

C1) On 6...N8d7?!

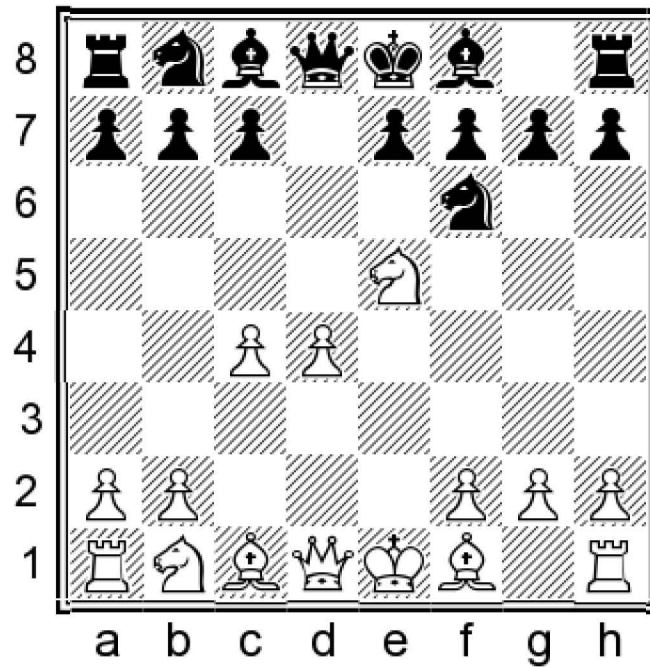


Position after: 6...N8d7?!

The easiest way to gain an edge consists of 7.Nxf7! Kxf7 8.c5 recovering the piece since the greedy 8...Nd5? 9.Qh5+ Ke6 loses to 10.g3!. You may have noticed the difference with the variation ^(to the line)1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.Nf3 dxe5 5.Nxe5 Nd7 6.Nxf7 Kxf7 7.Qh5+ Ke6 8.g3: here the white c-pawn takes away the d6-square from the black king!

C2) 6...g6 transposes into ^(to the line)1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.Nf3 dxe5 5.Nxe5 g6 6.c4 Nb6 – see the relevant section. This may well be Black's best after 5.c4.

D) 5...Nf6 6.Nxe5

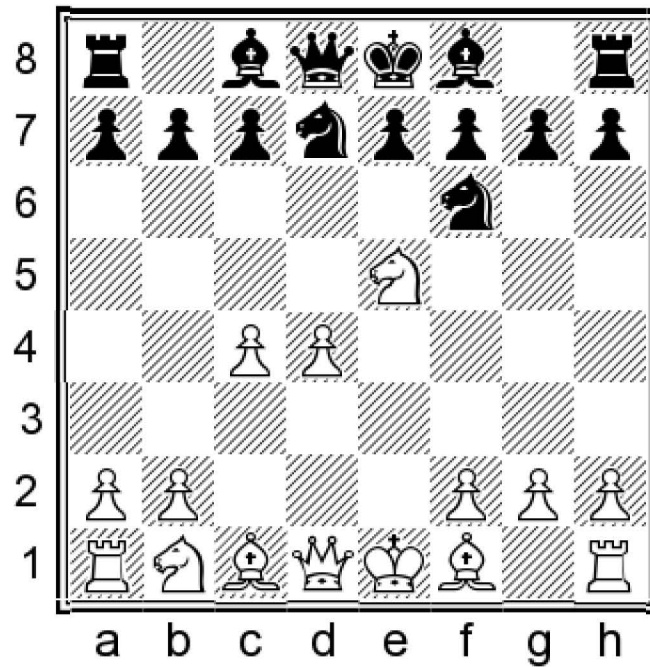


Position after: 6.Nxe5

D1) As mentioned in the ^(to the line)1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.Nf3 dxe5 5.Nxe5 g6 section, the retreat 6...Nd5-b6 fits better with the fianchetto as it doesn't obstruct the dark-squared bishop. 6...g6?! 7.Nc3 Bg7 8.Be3² Ljubojevic, L – Williams, A Nizza 1974.

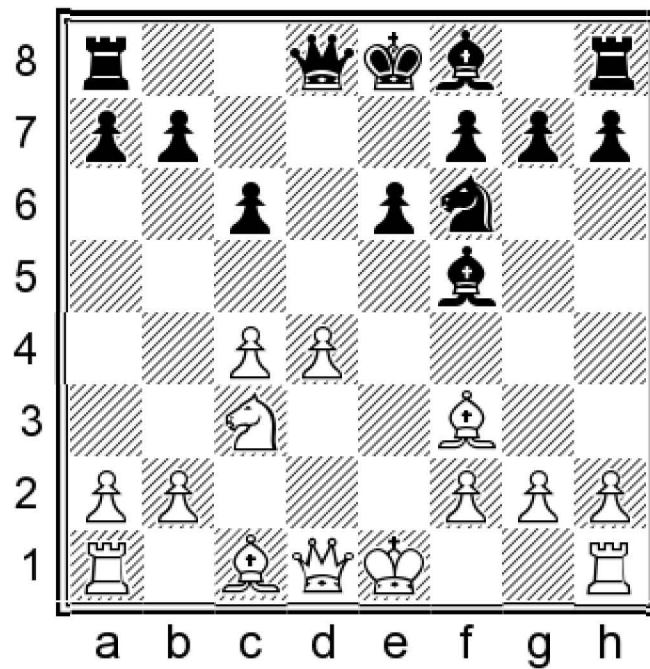
D2) 6...c5!/? looks like a reasonable try to me, when 7.Be3 is a bit better for White but completely unexplored [the same applies to 7.d5].

D3) 6...Nbd7



Position after: 6...Nbd7

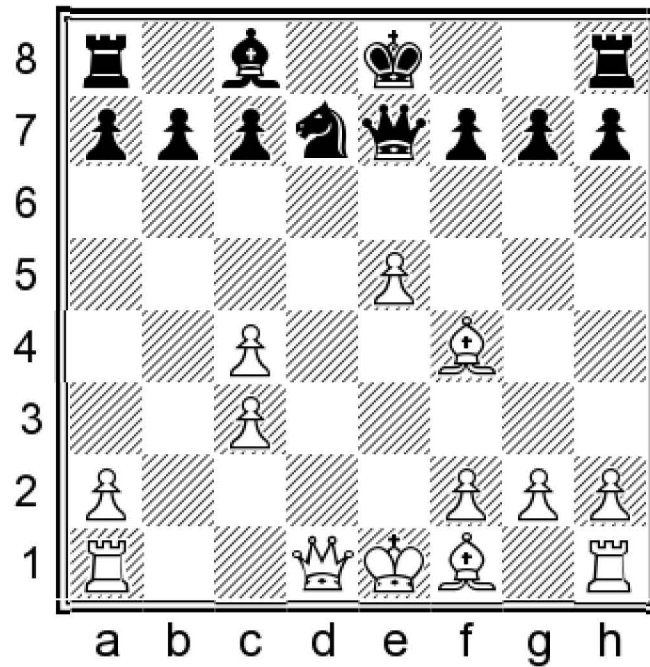
- D3.1)** 7.f4!? e6 [7...c5 8.Be3²] 8.Nc3 c5 9.d5?! [9.Be3!²] 9...exd5
 10.cxd5 Bd6= Bortnyk, O (2581) – Luch, M (2433) Tallinn (blitz) 2016.
- D3.2)** 7.Nxd7 contradicts the motto “If you have more space don’t trade pieces”, but could nevertheless be good enough for a small pull.
 7...Bxd7 8.Nc3 c6 9.Be2 [9.Bf4!? followed by Qb3.] 9...Bf5 10.Bf3 e6.



Position after: 10...e6

This happened in the game Klauser, M (2393) – Hugentobler, P (2188) Zurich 2015, where after 11.0-0 Bd6 Black had little to complain about. [White could have tried 11.d5!? but then the fight for the initiative would have remained open. For instance, 11...Bb4 12.dxc6?! Qxd1+ 13.Kxd1 0-0-0+ 14.Ke1 bxc6 15.Bxc6 Ng4³.]

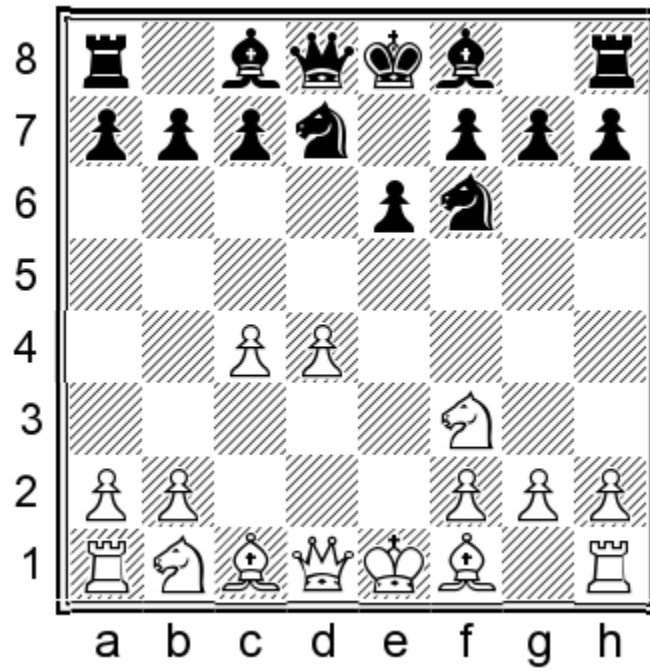
D3.3) 7.Bf4 Nxe5 8.Bxe5 Nd7 9.Bf4 [9.Bg3!] 9...e5!? 10.dxe5 Bb4+ 11.Nc3 Bxc3+ 12.bxc3 Qe7



Position after: 12...Qe7

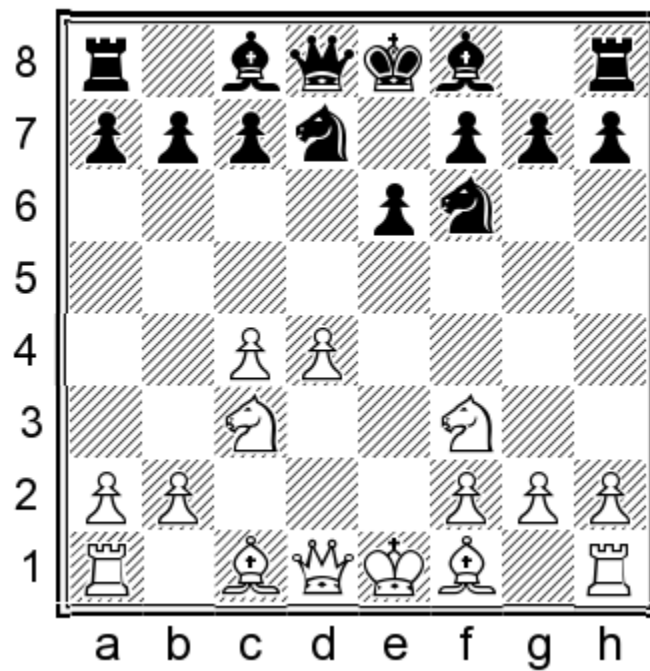
This occurred in Schmidek, E (2389) – Bernadskiy, V (2588) Karlsruhe 2018, where after 13.Qe2?! 0-0 Black had obvious compensation.
[According to the engine 13.Be2 and 13.Qd5 were stronger and gave White some hopes of being a trifle better.]

D3.4) 7.Nf3 e6



Position after: 7...e6

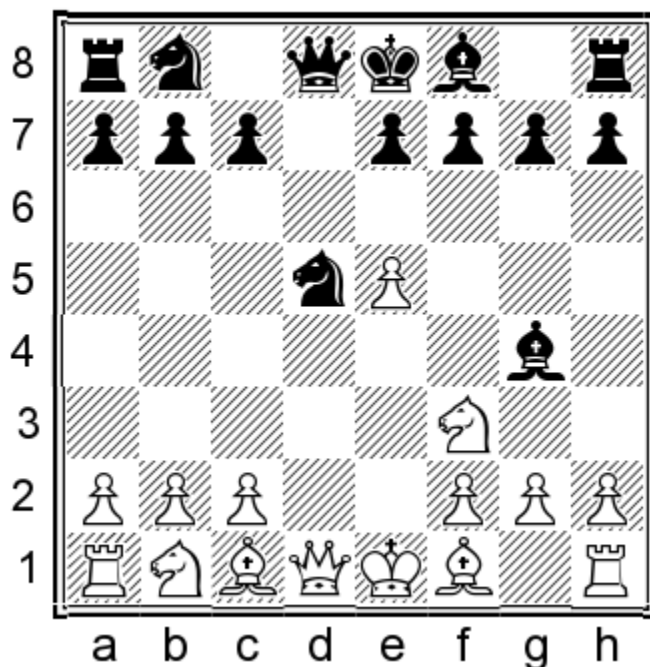
8.Nc3 [8.Be2 Be7 Abasov, N (2577) – Markus, R (2672) Kigali 2017
could transpose – or 8...c5!?.]



Position after: 8.Nc3

8...Be7 [8...b6 9.Be2 Bb7 10.0-0 Be7 11.Bf4 0-0 12.Qd3 Nh5 13.Bc1 Nhf6 14.Bf4 Nh5 15.Be3² Piorun, K (2631) – Berkes, F (2666) Skopje 2019; White keeps a slight plus owing to his space advantage but Black is solid.] 9.Bf4² Fernandez Cardoso, A (2427) – Aloma Vidal, R (2400) Balaguer 2012.

5...Bg4

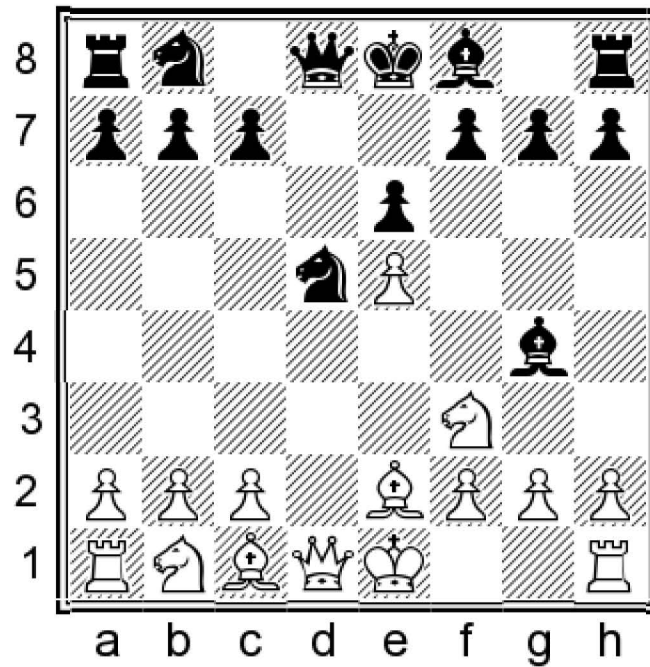


Position after: 5...Bg4

6.h3

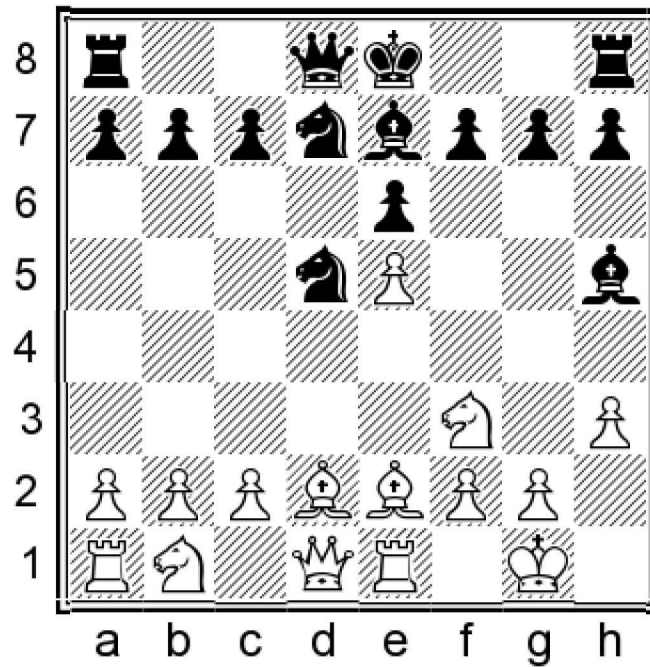
A) 6.c4?! Nb4 7.Qb3 [7.Qxd8+?! Kxd8 Chandler, P – Bagirov, V Giessen 1994 was already better for Black] 7...N8c6 8.Be3 Bf5 9.Na3 e6=

B) 6.Be2 e6



Position after: 6...e6

7.0-0 [The premature 7.c4?! would call for an immediate sanction:
 7...Nb4! 8.Qxd8+ Kxd8 9.Na3 Bxf3 10.Bxf3 N8c6³ with the dual threat of
 ...Nxe5 and ...Nd3+, as in the game Mahia, G (2367) – Benjamin, J (2523)
 Rhodes 2019.] 7...Be7 [7...Nc6 8.Re1 – or 8.c4 Nb6= – Now, rather than
 8...Bb4 9.c3 Be7 as seen in Postny, E (2600) – Zaitsev, A (2473)
 chess.com 2020, Black had available the stronger 8...Ndb4!=.] 8.h3 Bh5
 9.Re1 Nd7 10.Bd2



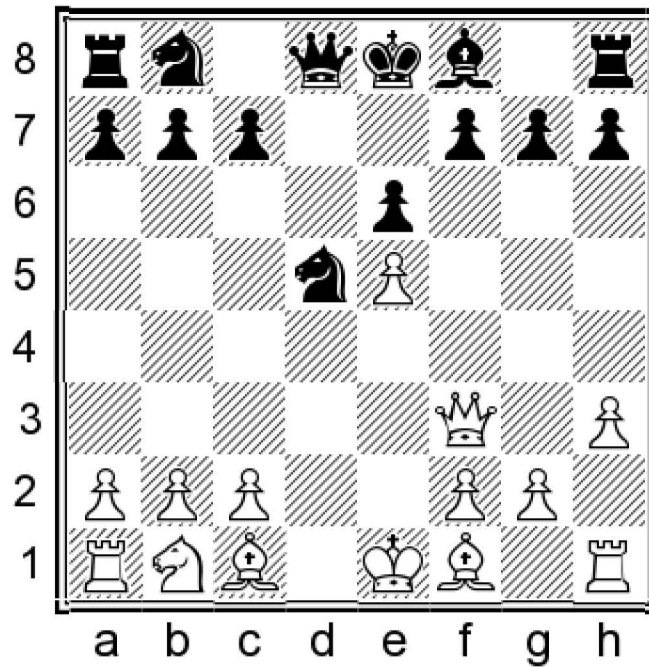
Position after: 10.Bd2

10...c6 [The more flexible 10...0-0 is an obvious alternative.] 11.c4 The position was balanced in Nun, J (2376) – Cervený, P (2292) Czechia 2013.

6...Bxf3

Black does not need to offer White the opportunity for the thematic pawn sacrifice 6...Bh5?! 7.e6.

7.Qxf3 e6



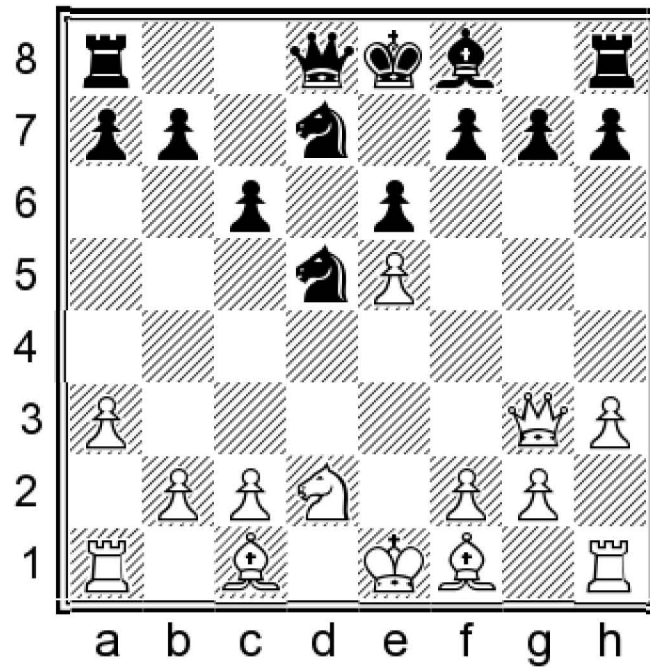
Position after: 7...e6

As Black will usually play ...c7-c6 soon, play resembles the line 1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.Nf3 Bg4 5.Be2 c6 followed by ...Bxf3, ...dxe5 and ...e6. On principle this version favors Black a bit, but some care is still required to level the chances.

8.Bc4

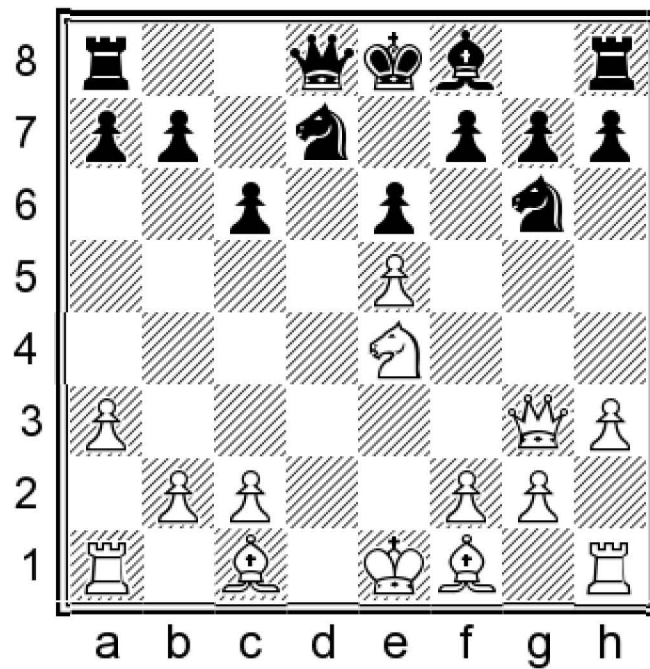
A) 8.a3 Sooner or later White will have to push the knight back with c2-c4. This prophylactic move denies the knight access to the b4-square.

8...c6 9.Qg3 [the hasty 9.c4?! Ne7= seen in Pakleza, Z (2498) – Barthel, A (2230) Reykjavik 2015 seems to ease Black's task; a mixture of ...Nd7/...Qc7 and then either ...Ng6 or ... Nf5 is on the cards] 9...Nd7 10.Nd2



Position after: 10.Nd2

This position was reached in Steiner, L – Koblencs, A Brno 1937 and a little more recently in Kovanova, B (2388) – Gritsayeva, O (2321) Kaliningrad 2015, which continued 10...Ne7 [10...h5!?!; and 10...Qa5, intending 11.c3 0-0-0 12.Nc4 Qa4, were viable alternatives] 11.Ne4 Ng6 [11...Nf5!?!].

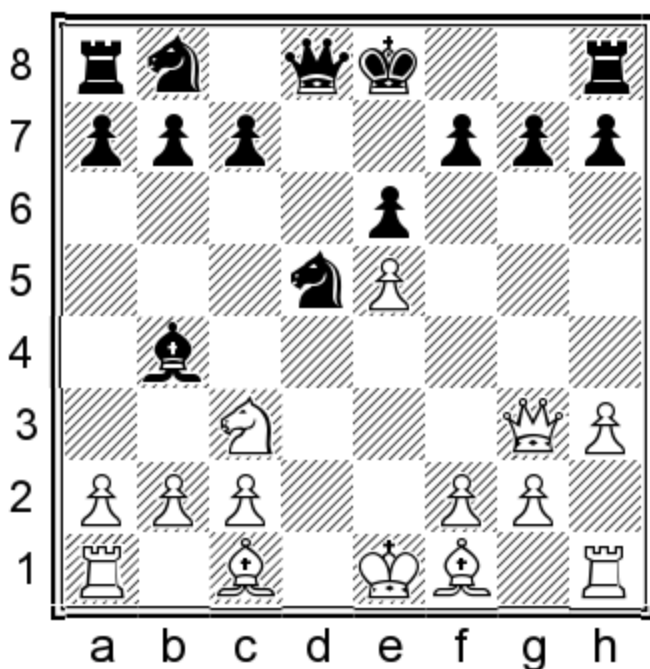


Position after: 11...Ng6

Now instead of 12.f4 Nc5 with mutual chances, White could have tried 12.Nd6+ Bxd6 13.exd6 when the computer slightly prefers the white prospects.

B) On 8.Nc3!? I'd recommend avoiding 8...Nb4 in view of 9.Qe4² and go for the robust 8...c6. Alternatively, 8...Bb4 has its merits too and after

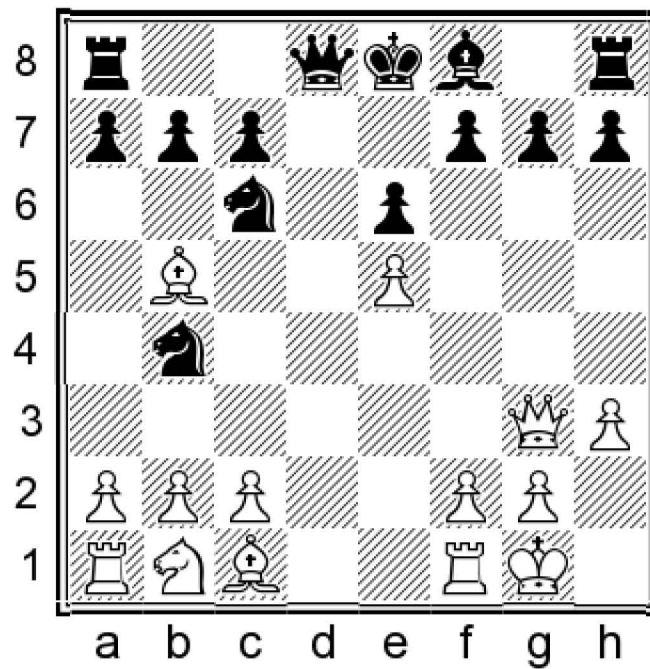
9.Qg3! from Johansson, B (2292) – Ward, B (2309) ICCF email 2007,



Position after: 9.Qg3!

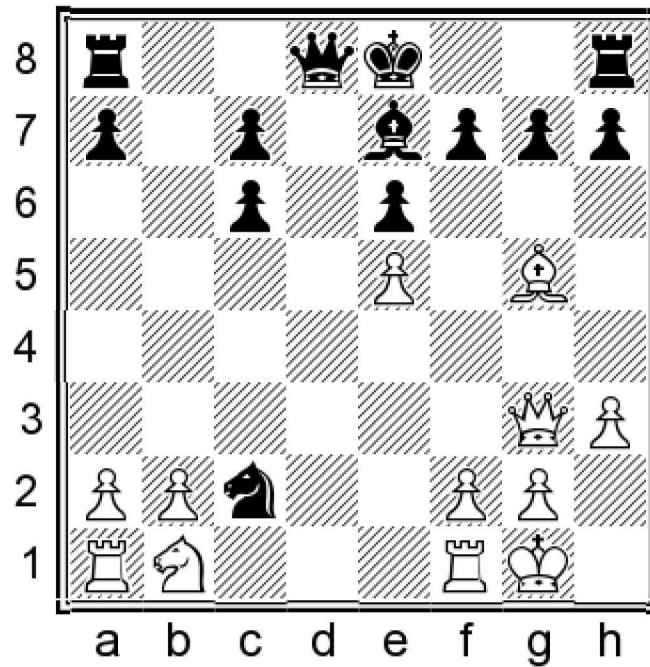
the evaluation of the position could well depend on 9...c6 with the intention of ...Qa5Nd7, ...0-0-0. [9...g6 is weakening and 9...0-0? loses an exchange to 10.Bh6.] Following 10.Qxg7 Rf8 11.Bd2 Qa5 Black has decent compensation and 10.Bd2 Qa5 11.Rd1 Nd7 looks fully playable too.

C) The rare bird 8.Qg3 (four games out of 200 in my database) is, surprisingly, C&K's main line. 8...Nc6 9.Bb5 Ndb4 [9...Qd7!? preparing for ...a7-a6 and possibly castling long.] 10.0-0!



Position after: 10.0-0!

This critical move was played in Jackova, J (2403) – Palliser, R (2411) Millfield 2004, which continued 10...Nxc2 11.Bg5 [11.Qc3 Nxa1 12.Bxc6+ bxc6 13.Qxc6+ Ke7 is labelled as equal by the engine, whether White immediately repeats with 14.Qc5+ Ke8 15.Qc6+ or if he coolly develops his knight or bishop] 11...Be7 12.Bxc6+ bxc6

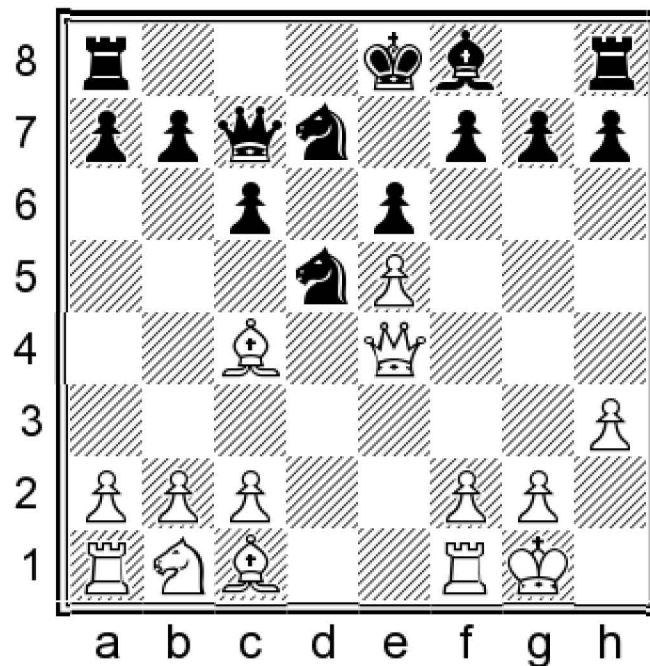


Position after: 12...bxc6

13.Bxe7 [13.Qc3 Nxa1 14.Qxc6+ Kf8 15.Bxe7+ Kxe7 16.Qc5+ Ke8 17.Nc3 is similar to 11.Qc3] 13...Kxe7 14.Nc3 Nxa1. At this point, as you can check by yourself, 15.Qxg7? was wrong and led after 15...Rg8 to a superior game for Black. Instead 15.Rd1! would have kept the balance.



A) 8...Nd7 9.Qe4 [9.Bxd5? Nxe5.] 9...c6 10.0-0 (At this juncture C&K suggest 10...b5 11.Bb3 Qc7 12.Re1 Be7 based on the game Vujakovic, B (2383) – Kovacevic, V (2499) Sibenik 2008, where White now chose the imprecise 13.Nd2?! rather than 13.Qg4!².) They also mention 10...Qc7 as a worthy alternative, which is indeed the case.

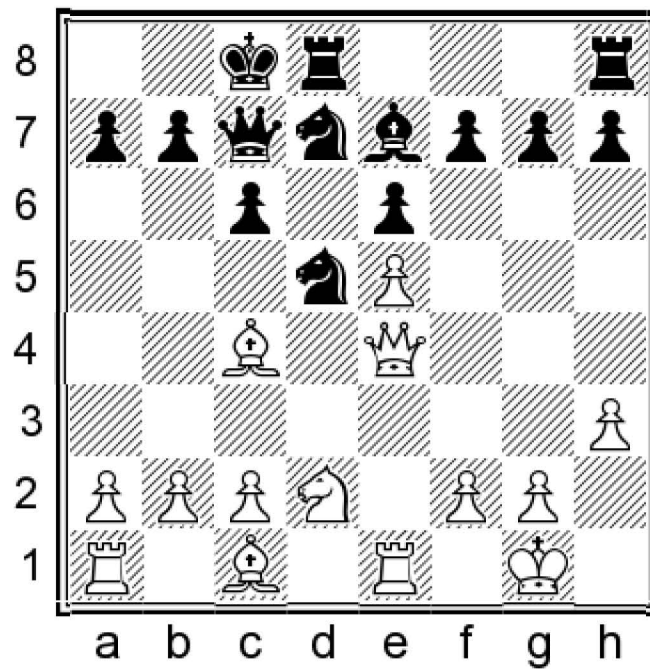


Position after: 10...Qc7

In a practical game Black will get his share of play, but for purists whether he can now fully and forcefully equalize is another question. Here are some examples. 11.Re1

A1) 11...0-0-0 leads to a kind of opposite-side castling with positional features, which means neither side will simply attack like crazy and go for the rival king's throat. 12.Nd2 Nc5 [12...g5!? 13.Nf3 h6∞] 13.Qe2 h6 14.Nf3 This happened in Liebert, H – Smyslov, V Polanica Zdroj 1966 when in place of 14...Be7 Black should again have preferred 14...g5.

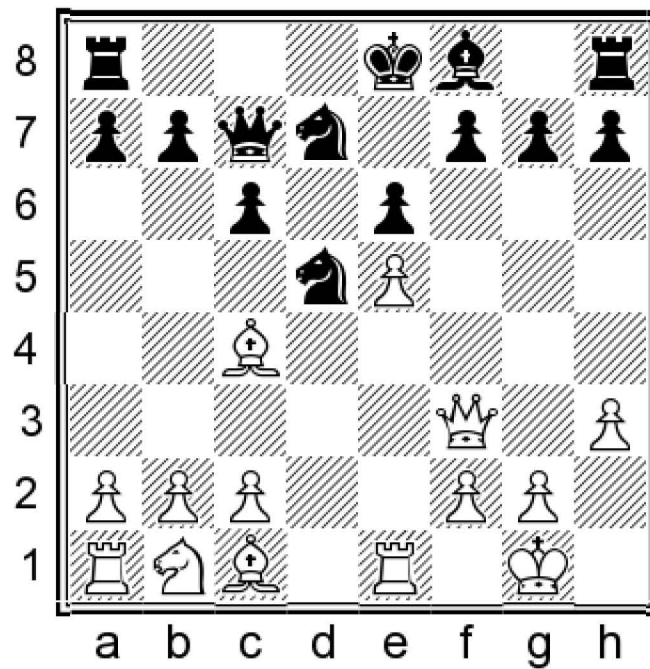
A2) 11...Be7 This keeps White guessing where Black will hide his king. 12.Nd2 [Unlike in the 10...b5 line seen above, 12.Qg4? doesn't work this time because the bishop is hanging: 12...Nxe5! 13.Qxg7? Bf6 winning.] 12...0-0-0 [12...b5 may transpose into C&K's recommendation of 10...b5.]



Position after: 12...0-0-0

13.a3?! [The top priority was to stop the black expansion that follows. Therefore 13.Nf3!².] 13...g5! 14.Bf1 h5 15.g3 h4 16.g4 Adorjan, A – Sapi, L Budapest 1970 was at this point agreed drawn. Black was comfortable and could have played on with either 16...Nc5 or 16...Bc5.

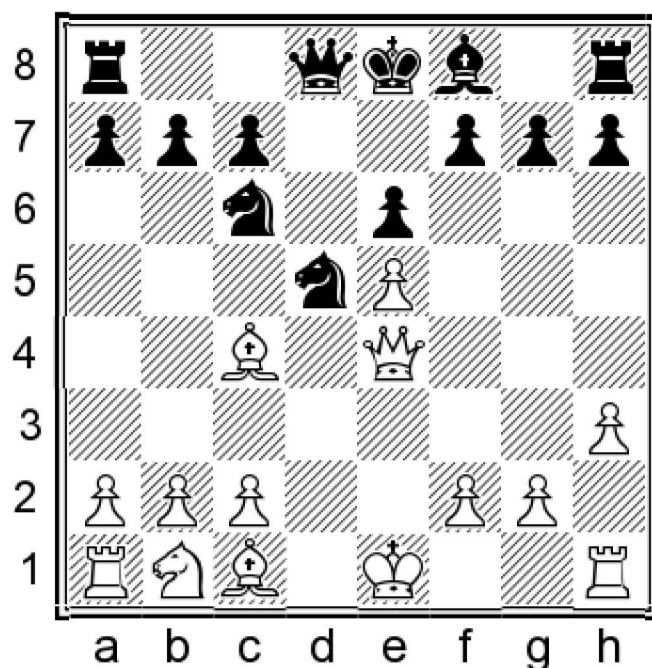
B) 8...c6!? 9.0-0 Nd7 10.Re1 Qc7



Position after: 10...Qc7

11.Bxd5?! [11.Qe4! transposing into 8...Nd7, which is the most likely scenario after 8...c6.] 11...cxd5 12.Qc3 Qxc3 13.Nxc3 Bb4³ Cereda, L (2338) – Bulmaga, I (2440) chess.com 2020.

9.Qe4



Position after: 9.Qe4

I am not sure which move to advise at this stage since White seems to be marginally better everywhere, with accurate play. So according to your tastes you may pick one of the following options.

9...Bc5

A) 9...Qd7!?

B) 9...Nb6 10.Bb5 Qd7!?

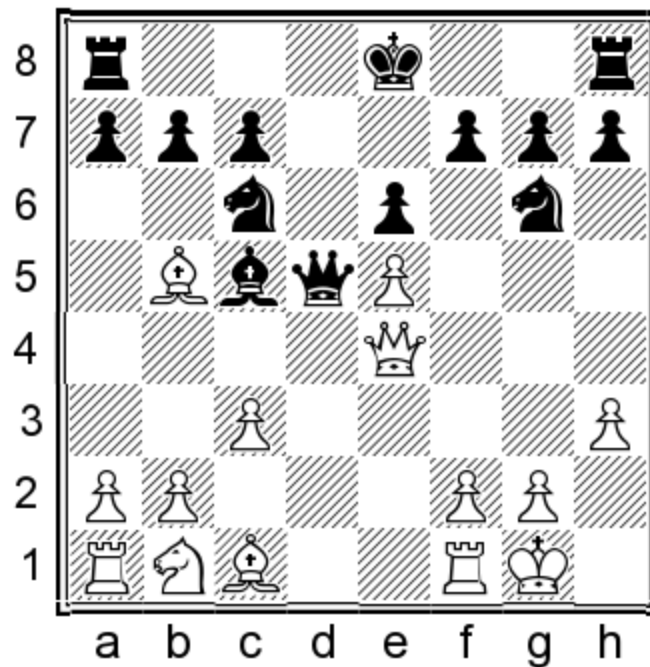
C) 9...a6 10.0-0?! [10.c3!] 10...Nb6=

D) 9...Nde7 10.Be3 [10.0-0?! Qd4= Van Wijgerden, C (2345) – Hoelzl, F (2425) Amsterdam 1979] 10...Nf5 11.Nd2! Nxe3 12.fxe3 Bc5 13.Ba6!² Sulskis, S (2553) – Chigladze, I (2384) Plovdiv 2008.

10.0-0 Nde7 11.c3 Ng6 12.Bb5

12.Ba6!²

12...Qd5=



Position after: 12...Qd5=

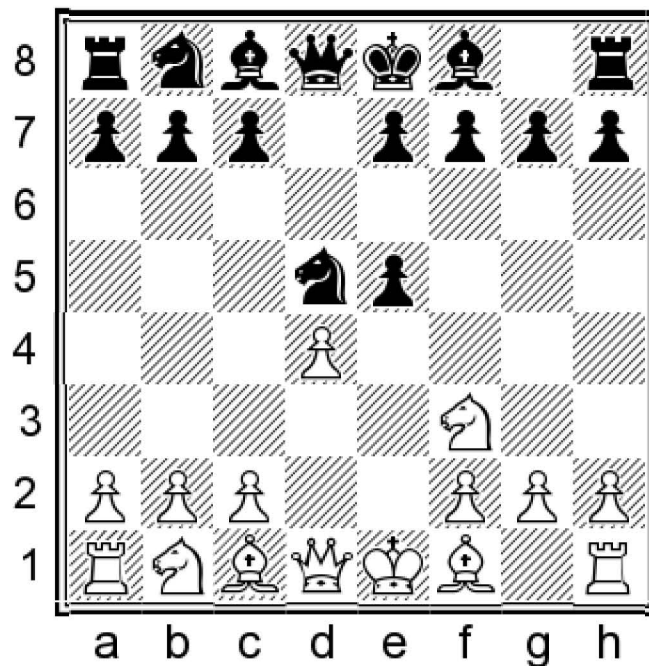
The position was about equal in the game Smirin, I (2638) – Givon, A (2405) Eilat 2012.

Conclusion: Despite being much rarer than the main highway 5.Nxe5, the options 5.dxe5 and 5.c4 deserve serious attention. The latter can be a bit troublesome for a black player whose repertoire entails the 5.Nxe5 c6 line, as some adaptation is then desirable. Study of the variation 5.Nxe5 g6 6.c4 Nb6 could be a suitable solution.

Going for 5.dxe5, White doesn't expect a large advantage from the opening but rather a safe little pressure that his opponent should manage to gradually neutralize, providing he plays carefully.

b) 5...e6, 5...Bf5

1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.Nf3 dxe5



Position after: 4...dxe5

5.Nxe5

After the knight has recaptured, moves other than 5...c6 or 5...g6 are dubious. Nevertheless, here are a few words about 5...Bf5 and 5...e6. 5...Nd7 is covered in the following subchapter.

5...Bf5?!

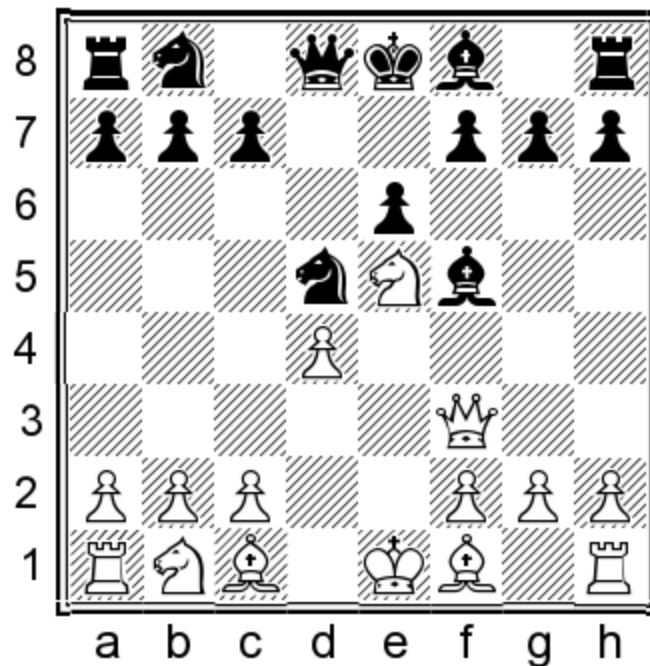
The drawback of this otherwise desirable move is that Black may be overwhelmed by a subsequent Qf3, eyeing both b7 and f7. In addition, his knight and bishop constitute targets for the enemy pawns.

5...e6?! Locking in the light-squared bishop is an unnecessary concession. There is no need to go into details here, White should just go 6.c4 followed by Nc3, Be3 and enjoy a risk-free initiative. In the game Michell, R – Reti, R Margate 1923, White was instead more hesitant and enabled his great opponent to more or less equalize: 6.Bd3 Nd7 7.0-0 Nxe5 8.dxe5 Bd7 9.Qe2 Qh4 10.c3?! 0-0-0∞.

6.c4!

This energetic advance yields White the initiative and a marked edge.

6.Qf3?! is less convincing, even though White may nevertheless be slightly better. 6...e6

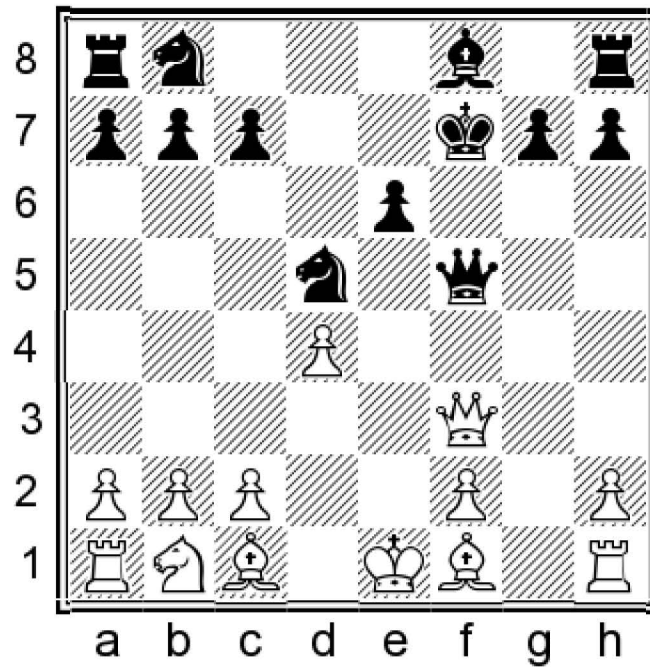


Position after: 6...e6

A) Now 7.c4?? comes too late and after 7...Nb4 Black is already close to winning!

B) 7.Bd3 Qf6 8.Bxf5 [8.Nc3! Bxd3 9.Qxd3² still gave White a little something.] 8...Qxf5 9.Qxf5 exf5 This was about level in Bouton, C – Villeneuve, A France 1993 as the doubled f-pawns were not a big handicap.

C) 7.Nxf7 Flashy but not terribly efficient. 7...Kxf7 8.g4 Qf6 9.gxf5 Qxf5

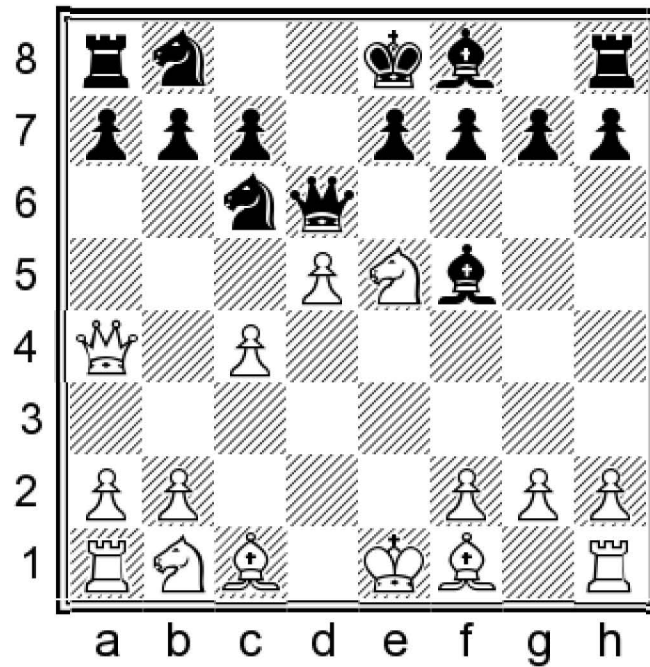


Position after: 9...Qxf5

Now if White refrains from swapping queens it is unclear whether his king will be safer than its counterpart. 10.Qxf5+ exf5 11.Bc4 c6 12.Nc3 Bb4 13.0-0 Bxc3 14.bxc3 Nd7∞ Khamrakulov, D (2451) – Haznedaroglu, K (2496) Ordu 2017, ½-½ (35).

6...Nf6

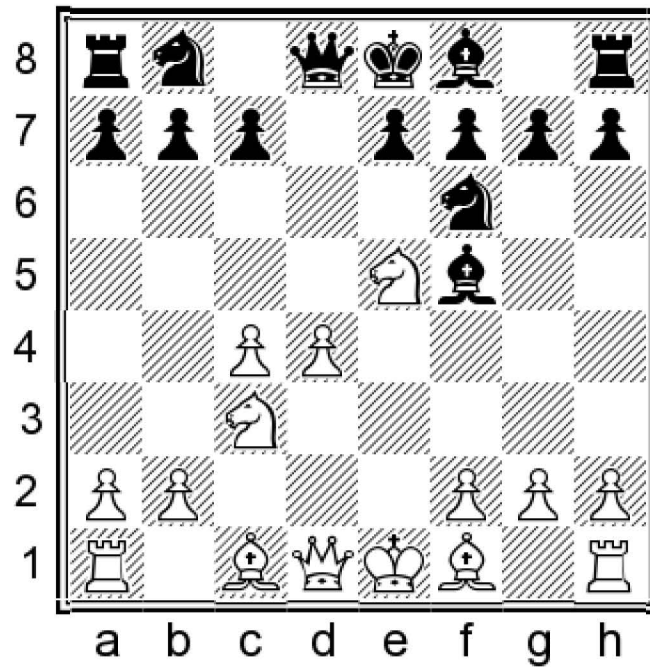
Surprisingly, the jump 6...Nb4!? doesn't lose material by force, but the black position remains unenviable. 7.Qa4+ N4c6 8.d5 Qd6



Position after: 8...Qd6

9.Nd3! Bxd3 10.Bxd3 Qb4+ 11.Nc3 Qxa4 12.Nxa4 Ne5 13.Be2 e6 14.f4 Ng6 15.dxe6± This happened in Prozorovsky, V (2382) – Nepustil, F (2388) ICCF email 2017, where White had the bishop pair and the better pawn structure.

7.Nc3



Position after: 7.Nc3

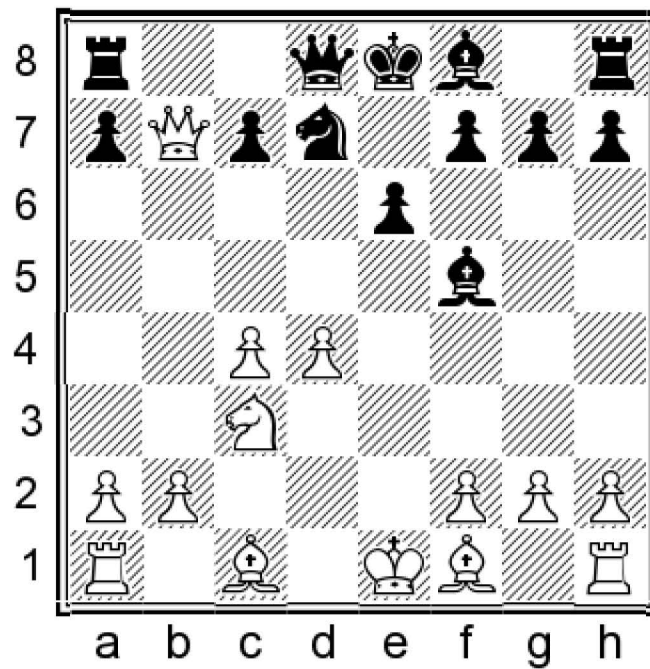
7...Nbd7

7...e6? 8.g4 Bg6 9.Bg2 c6 10.h4+– Black was already in dire straits in the correspondence game Karasek, L (2382) – Susedik, I (2117) Slovakia 2001, where he lost his bishop following 10...Nbd7 11.Nxd7! Qxd7 12.h5. 10...h6 11.Nxg6 fxg6 would have avoided that fate but without being less disastrous: 12.g5!.

8.Qf3!

The computer is more enthusiastic about this queen sortie than about 8.Bf4 e6 9.Be2 as played in Jones, L – Alekhine, A Great Britain (simul) 1923. Black should now have traded knights, with an acceptable game.

8...e6 9.Nxd7 Nxd7 10.Qxb7

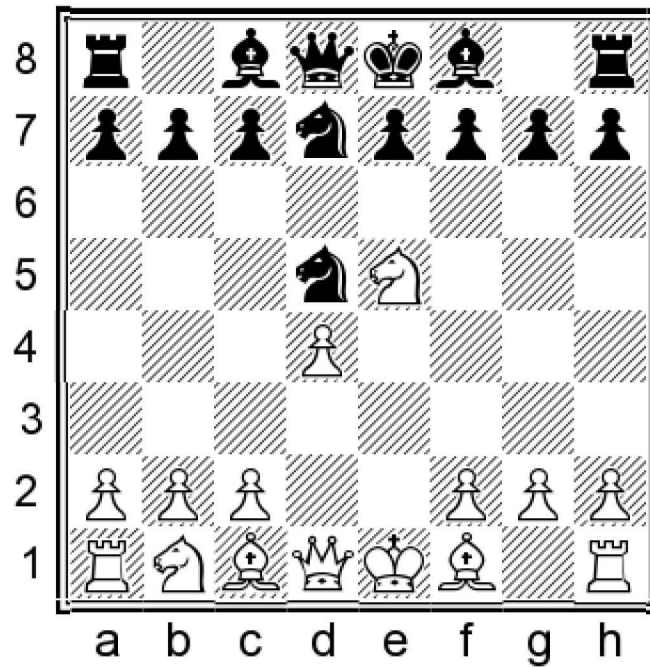


Position after: 10.Qxb7

It isn't obvious whether Black will get anything tangible for his missing pawn.

c) 5...Nd7

1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.Nf3 dxe5 5.Nxe5 Nd7?



Position after: 5...Nd7?

The following piece sacrifice is the refutation of Black's careless last move, and the explanation of why 5...c6 and 5...g6 are the main moves here.

Strangely enough, although the strike 6.Nxf7!

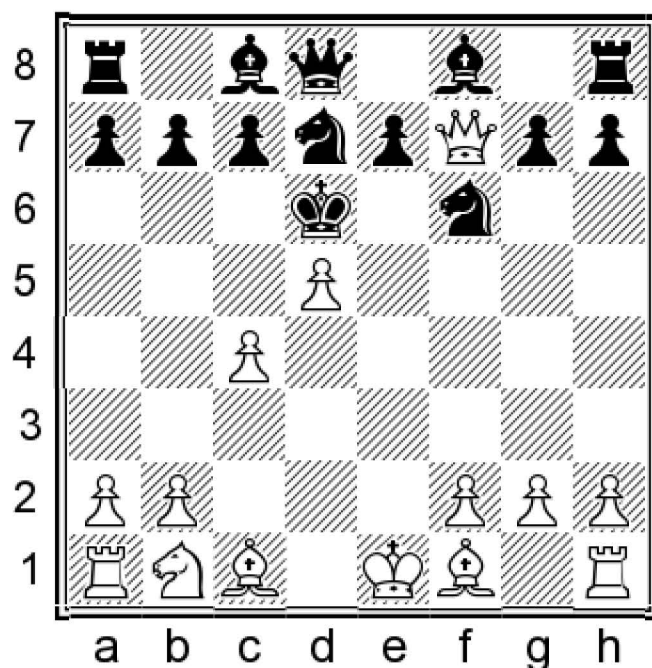
has been known about for ages, John Shaw's analysis, published in 2016, could be the first clear and final refutation.

6...Kxf7 7.Qh5+ Ke6 8.c4

8.g3!? looks good enough for an advantage, see the Bonus Lines section, but is less nasty.

8...N5f6 9.d5+ Kd6 10.Qf7!

10.Bf4+?? might look tempting at first sight, until you realize that after 10...e5 11.dxe6+ Kxe6 White is a piece down for a meagre pawn and can thus resign!



Position after: 10.Qf7!

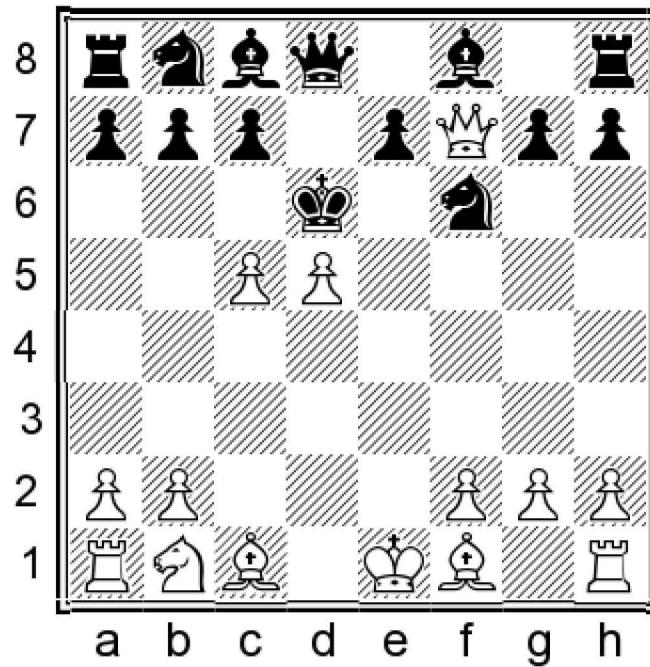
The following few moves are now forced.

10...Ne5!

By far the most resilient. Before looking at *Playing 1.e4! Volume 1* from John Shaw I wasn't even aware that 10...Nb8 and 10...Nb6 "existed". Unlike with what I did with other lines of this book, I checked John's suggested refutation(s) only after I did my own work (I swear!). I suppose this can be forgiven because this particular variation (5...Nd7? 6.Nxf7 Kxf7 7.Qh5+ Ke6 8.c4) is just pretty bad and that for many reasons.

At any rate, what follows regarding these two black secondary attempts is borrowed from the Scottish GM's book.

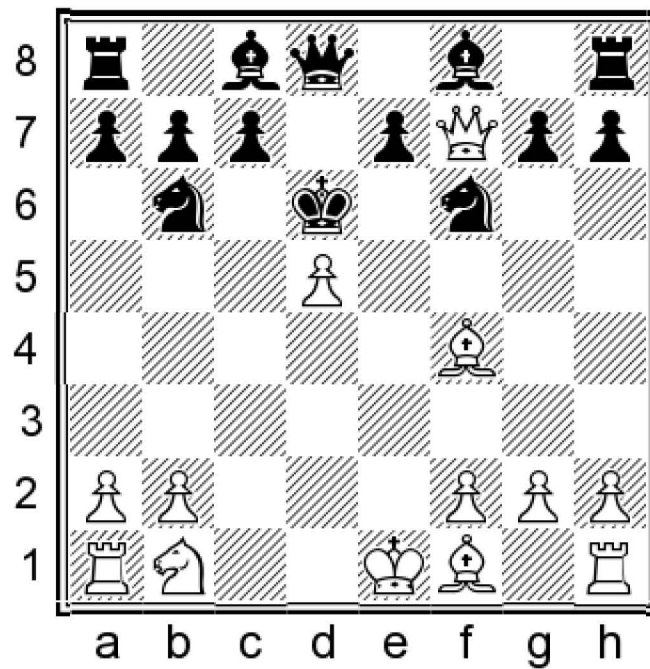
A) 10...Nb8 11.c5+



Position after: 11.c5+

11...Kd7 [11...Kxc5 12.Be3+ Kd6 13.Nc3+- looks like an even worse version for Black of 10...Nb6] 12.Bb5+ c6 13.dxc6+ bxc6 14.0-0 Qa5 15.Rd1+ Kc7 16.a4 cxb5 17.Bf4+ Kb7 18.axb5 Qxa1 19.c6+ Kb6 20.Qb3 Black will be mated soon.

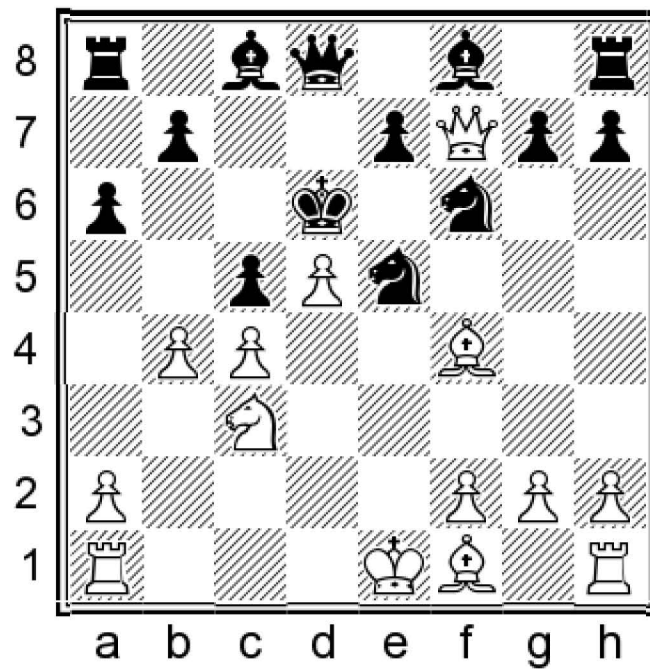
B) 10...Nb6 11.c5+ Kxc5 12.Be3+ Kd6 13.Bf4+!



Position after: 13.Bf4+!

13...e5 [or 13...Kc5 14.Nc3 with the idea of 15.Rc1+–] 14.dxe6+ Kc6
 15.Nc3+– Shaw stops his analysis here, which raises the interesting question of when to stop from the author's perspective. In this case White is indeed winning even though 15...Qe7 means the queens will get exchanged soon, as the black king will get mated: 16.Bb5+ Kc5 17.Be3+ and so on.

11.Bf4 c5 12.Nc3 a6 13.b4!

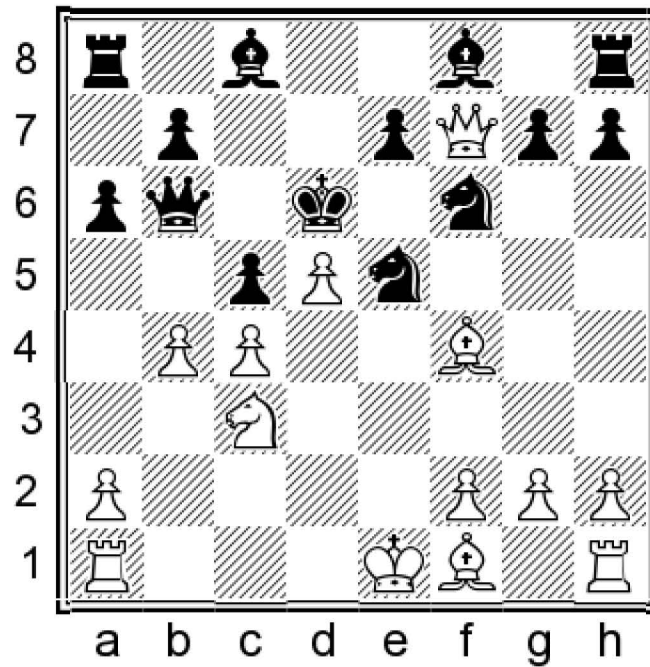


Position after: 13.b4!

Even if Black can (and must) hold the c5-spot for the moment it is potentially useful for White to open the b-file. Now the dubious 13...cxb4 would be followed by 14.c5+ Kxc5 15.Na4+ Kd6 16.Nb2+—, when the pony is about to complete its circuit by jumping to either c4 or d3.

13...b6

13...Qb6



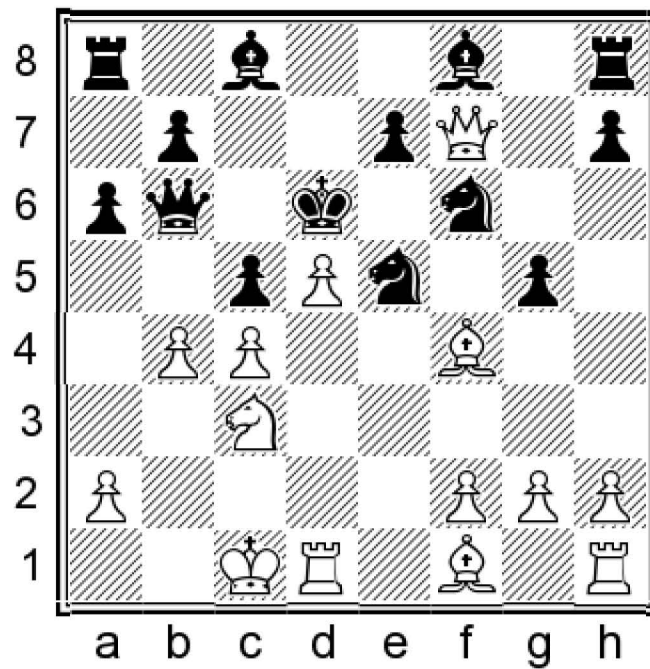
Position after: 13...Qb6

A) 14.0-0-0?! lets Black escape provided he shows some accuracy.

A1) 14...cxb4?

A1.1) 15.Na4? Qxf2 16.c5+ Kd7 17.c6+! bxc6 18.dxc6+ Kxc6 19.Bxe5 Qe3+ 20.Rd2 Qe1+ [20...Qxe5?? 21.Qc4+-] 21.Kc2? [21.Rd1 Qe3+ 22.Rd2 Qe1+ Black can now force a draw by repetition of moves] 21...Bf5+ 22.Bd3 Qxe5-- Parmentier, X (2260) – Nataf, I (2350) Cap d'Agde 1996.

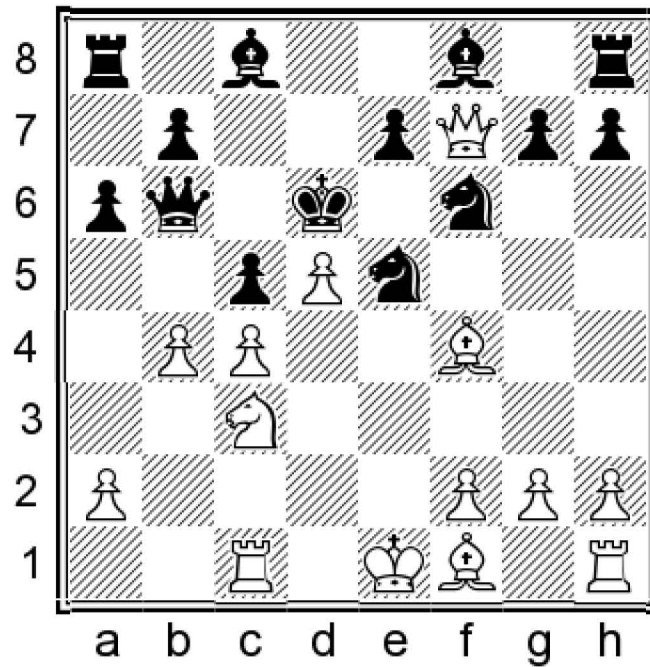
A1.2) 15.Ne4+!! Nxe4 16.Bxe5+ Kxe5 17.d6+- **A2)** 14...g5



Position after: 14...g5

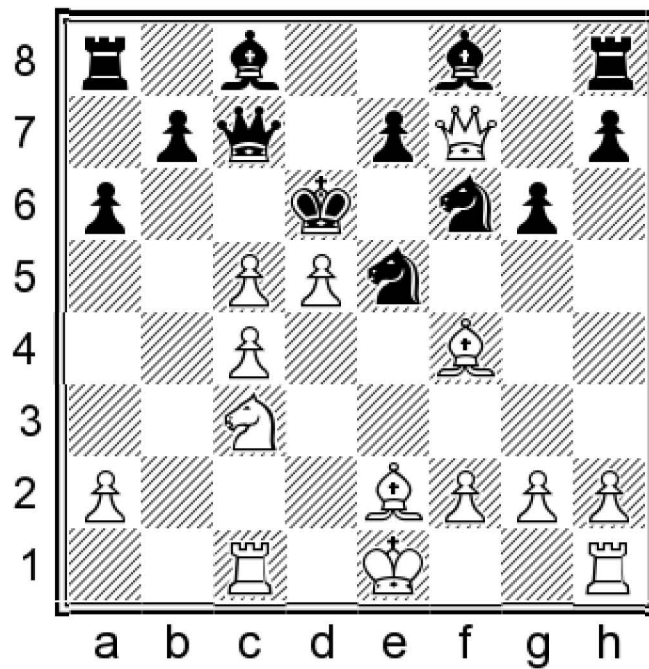
15.Bxe5+ [15.Bg3? Qxb4.] 15...Kxe5 16.d6 Qxb4 17.Rd5+ Nxd5
 18.Qxd5+ Kf6 19.Ne4+ Kg7 20.Qxg5+ Kf7 21.Qh5+ Kg8 22.Qd5+ e6
 23.Qg5+ Perpetual check will finish the game.

B) 14.Rc1!



Position after: 14.Rc1!

14...g6 [14...g5 15.Bg3+- Bf5? 16.Bd3!! 1-0 Manca, F – Sulskis, S Ortisei 2012; 14...Qc7 15.Na4 b6 16.Be2 g5 17.bxc5+ bxc5 18.Bxe5+ Kxe5 19.0-0 Qa5 20.Rce1 Kd6 21.Bd1+-] 15.Be2 Qc7 16.bxc5+ [16.Na4?? Bh6! A common defensive ploy in this line. 17.bxc5+ Kd7 18.Qe6+ Ke8 19.Qxe5 Bxf4 20.Qxc7 Bxc7-+ Prie, E (2470) – Nataf, I (2410) Andorra 1997.]

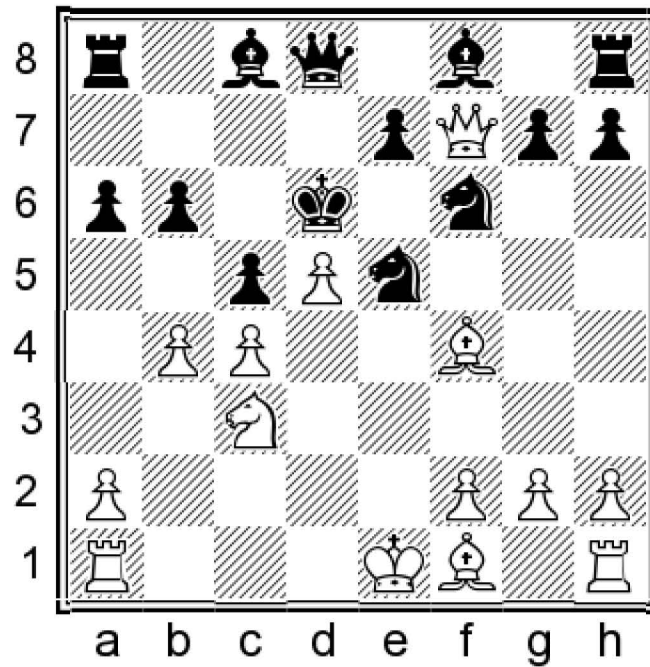


Position after: 16.bxc5+

B1) 16...Qxc5 17.Bxe5+ Kxe5 18.0-0 Bh6 19.Na4 Qc7 20.f4+ Bxf4 21.Rce1+- Black can prolong his sufferings with 21...Be3+, but obviously his king is too weak to nourish any realistic hopes.

B2) After the alternative capture 16...Kxc5 Black would also succumb as the coming variations show: 17.Na4+ Kd4 18.0-0 Nxf7 19.Bxc7+- or 17...Kb4 18.Rb1+ Kxa4 19.Bd1+ Ka3 20.Bc1+ Kxa2 21.Bb3+ Kxb1 22.Ba3 with a mate in two.

Back to 13...b6.

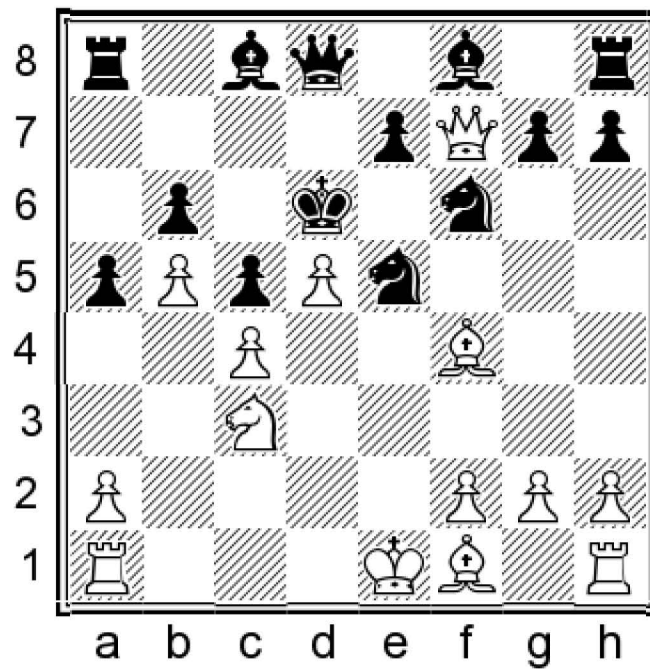


Position after: 13...b6

14.Bd3!

Chetverik and Kalininchenko don't mention this move, which seems the strongest; they analyze only its two alternatives, 14.b5 and 14.Rb1. They offer improvements in these two cases and may well be right that the situation is messy there.

A) 14.b5 a5

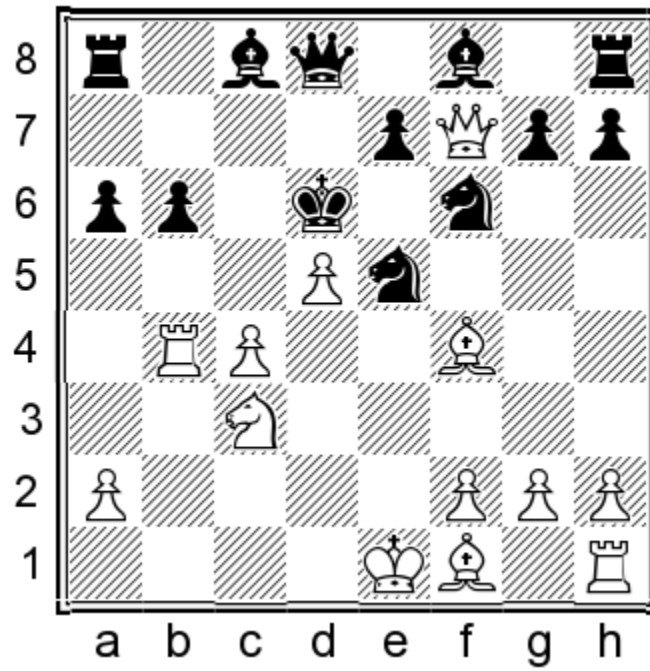


Position after: 14...a5

A1) 15.Bd3 g6 16.Ne4+ Nxe4 17.Bxe4 Bh6 18.Bxe5+ Kxe5 19.d6 Be6 20.Qf3 Now rather than 20...Rf8?! Black should try either 20...Bxc4 or 20...Bd2+ with a balanced game.

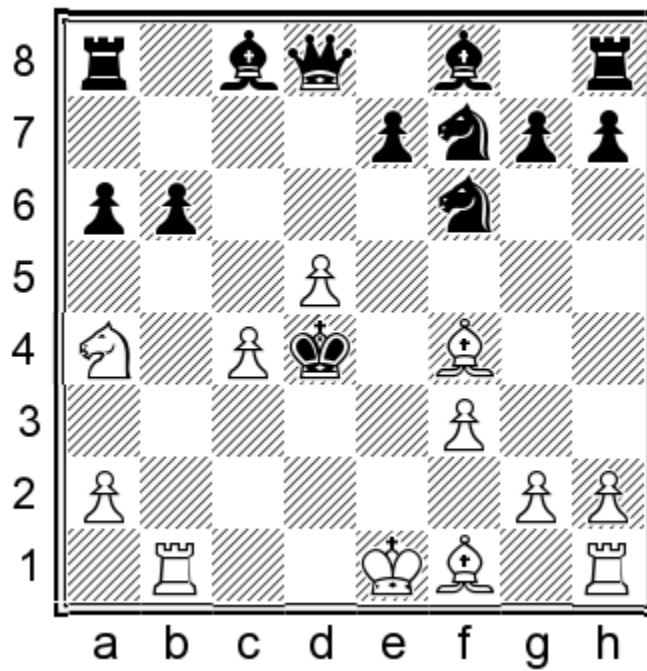
A2) 15.0-0-0 g6 16.Kb2 Bh6 17.Bxe5+ Kxe5 18.d6 Qf8 At this point the engine claims that both 19.f4 and 19.Rd5+ Nxd5 20.Qxd5+ Kf6 lead to equality.

B) 14.Rb1 cxb4 15.Rxb4



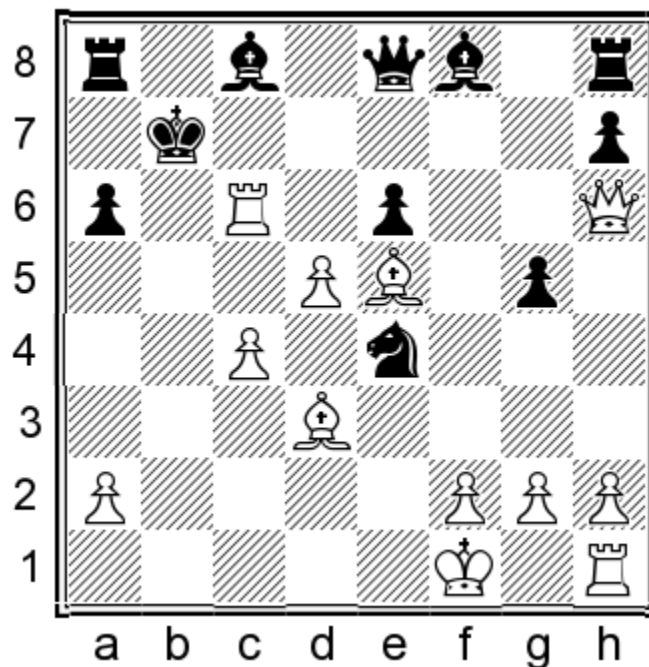
Position after: 15.Rxb4

15...e6! [15...Kc5?? may result in a cute finish. 16.Rb1 Nxf7 17.Na4+ Kd4



18.f3+–

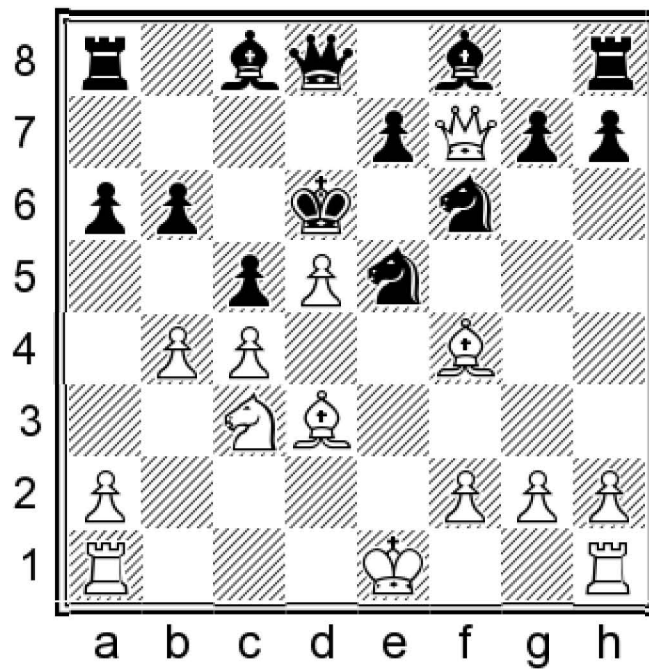
Position after: 18.f3+– Black is powerless against the lethal threat of 19.Rd1 mate; he can only postpone the inevitable by a few more moves.] 16.Bd3!? [16.Be2 Qd7 17.Rxb6+ Kc7 and so on. According to C&K the position offers mutual chances, an assessment I share.] 16...Qd7 17.Ne4+ Nxe4 18.Qh5 g5 19.Rxb6+ Kc7 20.Rc6+ Kb7 21.Bxe5 Bb4+ 22.Kf1 exd5 [22...Qe8? runs into the devastating 23.Qh6 Bf8



Position after: 23...Bf8

24.Bxe4!! Bxh6 25.Ke2 exd5 26.Rc7+ Kb6 27.Rb1+. Black has to give the queen back and enter a lost ending.] 23.Rc7+ Qxc7 24.Bxc7 Kxc7 25.cxd5 The machine rates White's chances a bit higher, but in a practical game any result is possible.

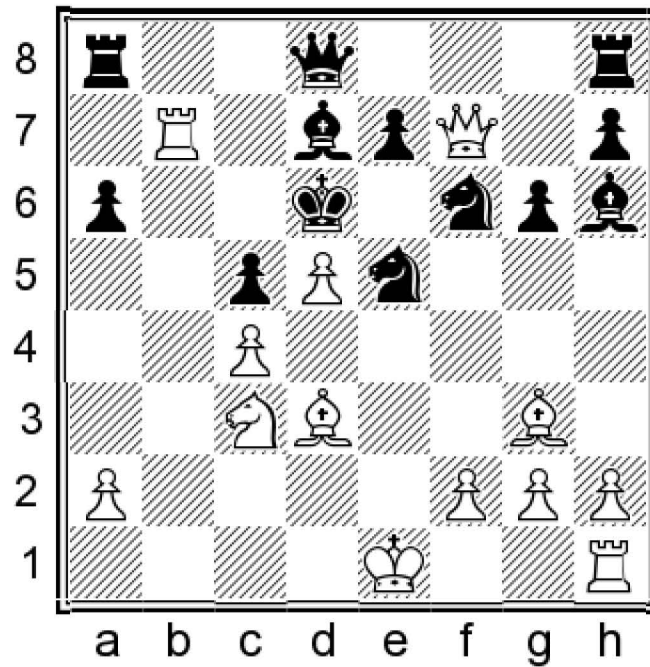
After 14.Bd3 Black is at a crossroads.



Position after: 14.Bd3!

14...g5

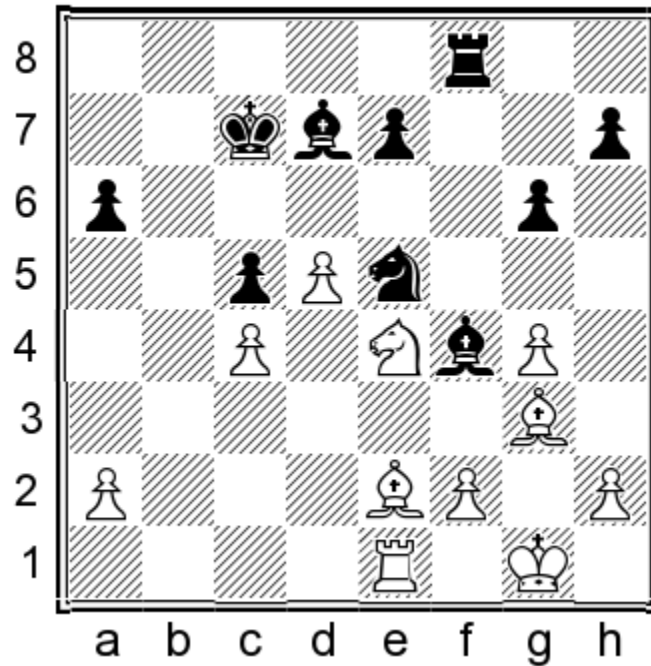
- A)** 14...cxb4 loses to 15.Ne4+ Nxe4 16.Bxe4 g5 17.Bxe5+ Kxe5 18.d6+–.
- B)** The same applies to 14...Qc7 15.Ne4+ Nxe4 16.Bxe4+–. Although Black would only be a pawn down following 16...Kd7 17.Qe6+ and 18.Qxe5, the endgame would be fairly hopeless.
- C)** 14...g6 15.bxc5+ bxc5 16.Rb1 Bh6 17.Rb7 Bd7 [17...Bxf4? accelerates the end: 18.Qxf6+ exf6 19.Ne4#] 18.Bg3±



Position after: 18.Bg3±

18...Rb8 [18...Rf8 19.Qxh7!+–.] 19.Rxb8 Qxb8 20.0-0 Black is not in time to trap the enemy queen because the imminent Rf1-e1 will threaten mate in one. His best seems to be entering a cheerless endgame following 20...Qf8 21.Re1 Nfg4 22.Qf3!. This cute finesse secures what should be a

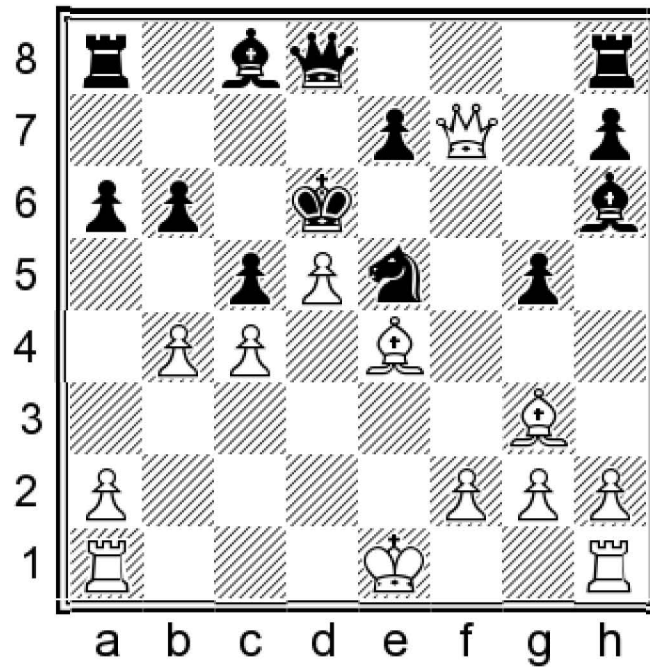
decisive advantage. 22...Qxf3 23.gxf3 Rf8 24.fxg4 Bf4 25.Ne4+ Kc7



26.Be2+-

Position after: 26.Be2+- The g4- and c5-pawns will drop, after which Black's pawns on a6 and e7 will be under fire. Black has some tiny practical chances to escape, but not more.

15.Bg3 Bh6 16.Ne4+ Nxe4 17.Bxe4

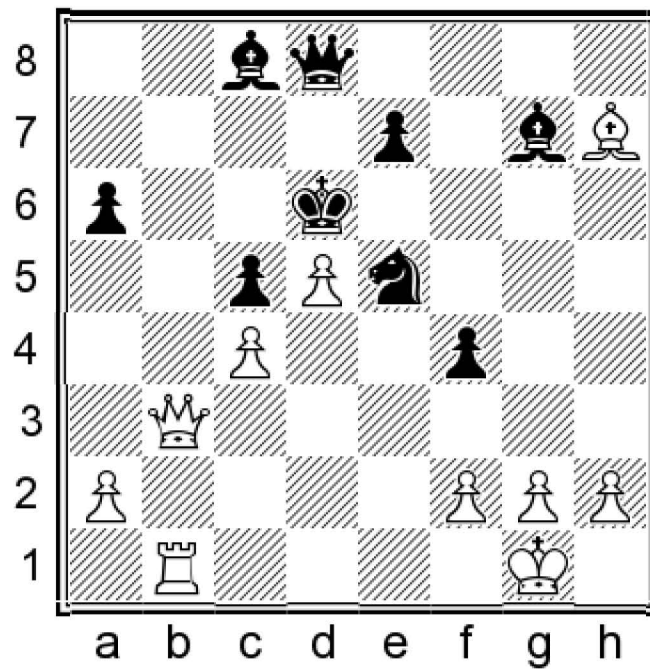


Position after: 17.Bxe4

17...Rb8

17...Qe8 18.Qf3 Bg7 19.bxc5+ bxc5 20.Rb1± Black is stuck with his unfortunate king and there is no need for White to rush. For instance, 20...Qd8 21.0-0 h5 22.h3 and so on.

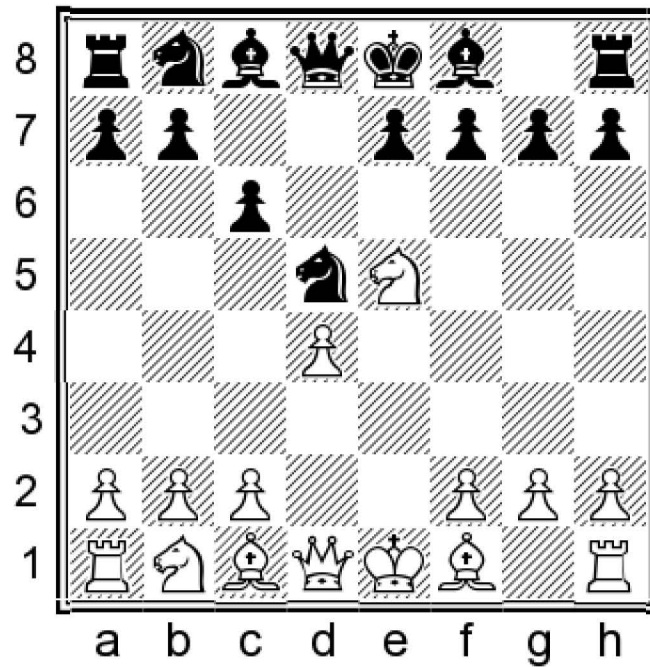
18.bxc5+ bxc5 19.0-0 Qe8 20.Qf3 Rf8 21.Qc3 Bg7 22.Rab1 Rxb1 23.Rxb1 Qd8 24.Bxh7 Rf4 25.Bxf4 gxf4 26.Qb3±



Position after: 26.Qb3±

Black isn't doing so badly from a material standpoint, but according to the computer he is nevertheless clearly worse.

d) 5...c6 6.Bd3 (Correspondence Practice) 1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.Nf3 dxe5 5.Nxe5 c6



Position after: 5...c6

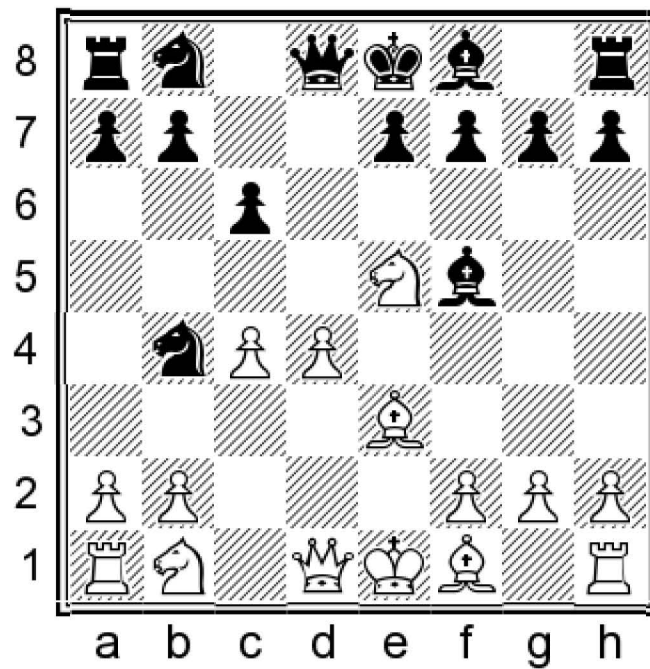
Since Black isn't threatening much at the moment, his opponent has a wide range of possible follow-ups.

6.Bd3

A) 6.c4?

A1) It's a wonder to me but some rather high-level correspondence games have continued with the clearly inferior 6...Nc7?. That being said, a White player rated over 2300 opting for 6.c4? is already pretty astonishing (shame on me, I once did that myself in an over-the-board encounter!).

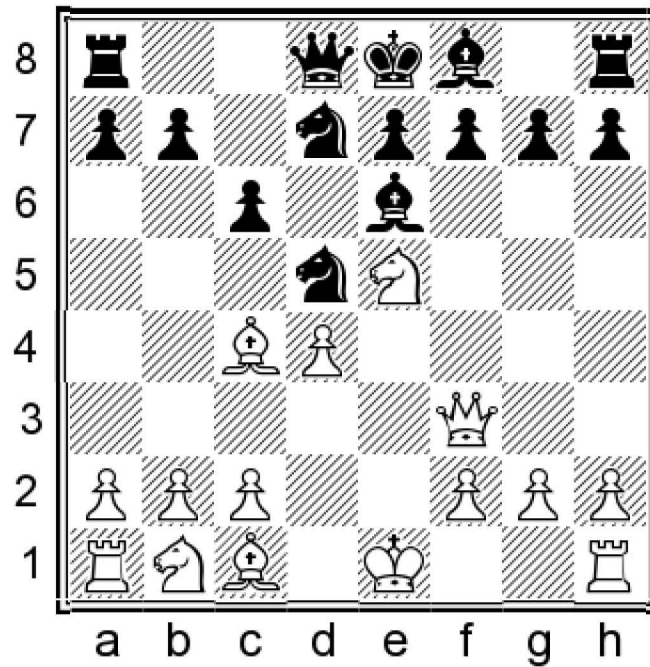
A2) 6...Nb4! Threatening 7...Qxd4!. 7.Be3 Bf5



Position after: 7...Bf5

8.Na3 [8.Nd3 e5! 9.Nxb4 Bxb4+ 10.Nc3 0-0³ Bauer, C (2612) – Loeffler, S (2413) Lausanne 2001] 8...Nd7 Rough equality appeared on the board in Olofsson, D (2539) – Hugentobler, P (2480) Switzerland 2002, among others.

B) I see 6.g3 and 6.Qf3?! as sub-optimal in the sense that they can't bother Black too much. That being said, if all White wants is a complex game with little theory, then these options are quite OK. After 6.Qf3 the game can continue with 6...Be6 7.Bc4 Nd7

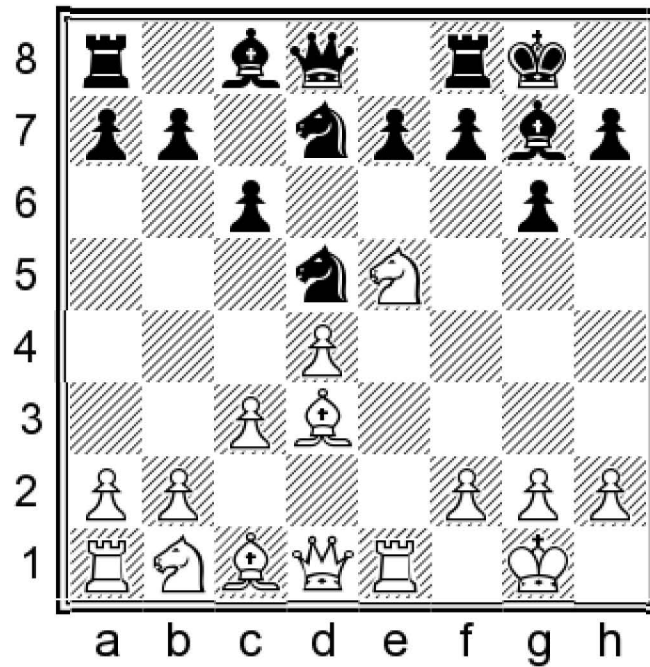


Position after: 7...Nd7

8.Nd3 [on 8.0-0 Black would continue 8...g6 anyway] 8...g6 9.0-0 [9.Nc3 Bg7 and thanks to a possible ...Qa5+ White can't win a pawn by taking twice on d5] 9...Bg7=. Tiits, T (2533) – Sprenger, E (2440) ICCF email 2003.

6...Nd7

6...g6 (see 5...g6) also makes sense, when it isn't yet clear whether the bishop will prove better placed at d3 than at c4. 7.0-0 Bg7 8.Re1 0-0 9.c3 Nd7

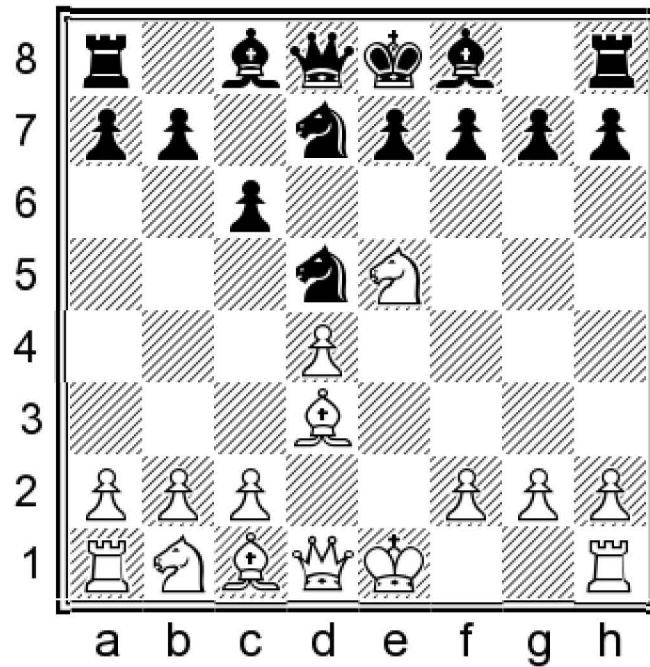


Position after: 9...Nd7

A) Given that he has more space, White usually declines the trade of knights, but following 10.Nf3 both 10...Re8, intending ...e7-e5, and 10...c5 look OK for Black.

B) 10.Nxd7 Qxd7 11.Na3 Qc7 12.Nc4 Rd8 13.Qf3 c5 This was around level in Strautins, V (2518) – Leutwyler, M (2200) ICCF email 2004.

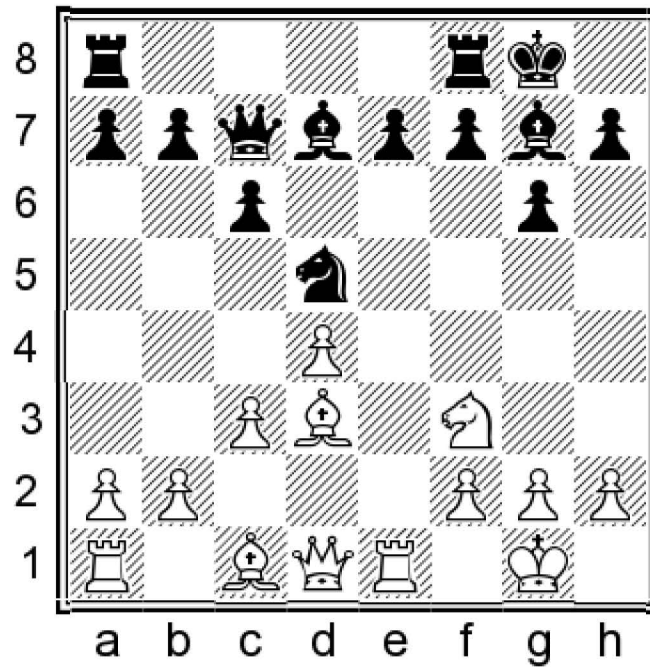
After 6...Nd7 White can consider three moves.



Position after: 6...Nd7

7.Nf3

A) 7.Nxd7 Bxd7 [7...Qxd7!? could possibly transpose into 6...g6 if White continues in the same vein as this line after 7...Bxd7.] 8.0-0 g6 9.Re1 Bg7 10.c3 0-0 11.Nd2 [11.Bg5!?] 11...Qc7 12.Nf3



Position after: 12.Nf3

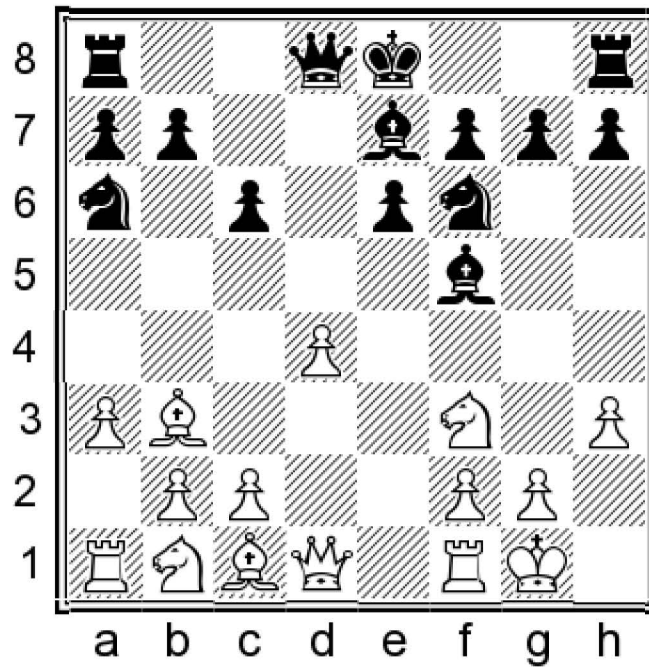
Michiels, B – Miroshnichenko, E Antwerp 2008. Now, among other worthy options, 12...c5 provided Black with counterplay.

B) In the event of 7.0-0 Nxe5 8.dxe5 Black is best advised (as strong correspondence players know) to avoid the disgraceful endgame deriving from 8...Nb4 and opt for 8...g6.

7...N7f6



8.h3 Nb4 9.Bc4 Bf5 Black is temporarily gaining time but that doesn't seem to solve all his opening issues. 10.Bb3 e6 11.a3 Na6 Black does not want to allow c2-c4 with gain of tempo (after 9...Nbd5). 12.0-0 Be7



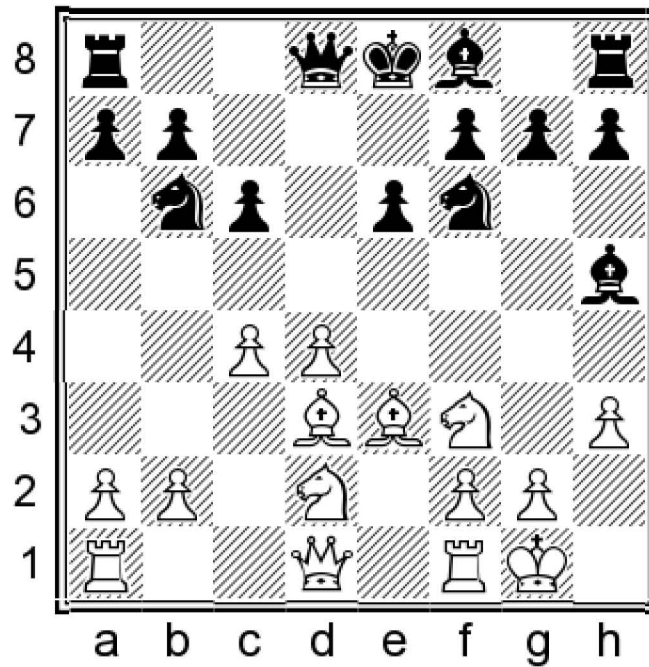
Position after: 12...Be7

White decided now to deprive Black of his bishop pair and stood a bit better following 13.Nh4 Bg6 14.Nxg6 hxg6 Moreno Carretero, C (2407) – Reichert, T (2333) ICCF email 2012.

8...Bg4

8...g6 shouldn't equalize fully either, for instance 9.a3 Bg7 10.c4 Nc7 11.Nc3 0-0 12.h3 Ne6 13.Be3 b6 14.Qd2² as in the game Poljak, D (2368) – Legemaat, G (2345) ICCF email 2009. Both sides have developed logically and White enjoys his customary space advantage.

9.h3 Bh5 10.c4 Nb6 11.Be3 e6 12.Nbd2



Position after: 12.Nbd2

We have been following the game Vidalina, F (2179) – Hugentobler, P (2451) ICCF email 2005.

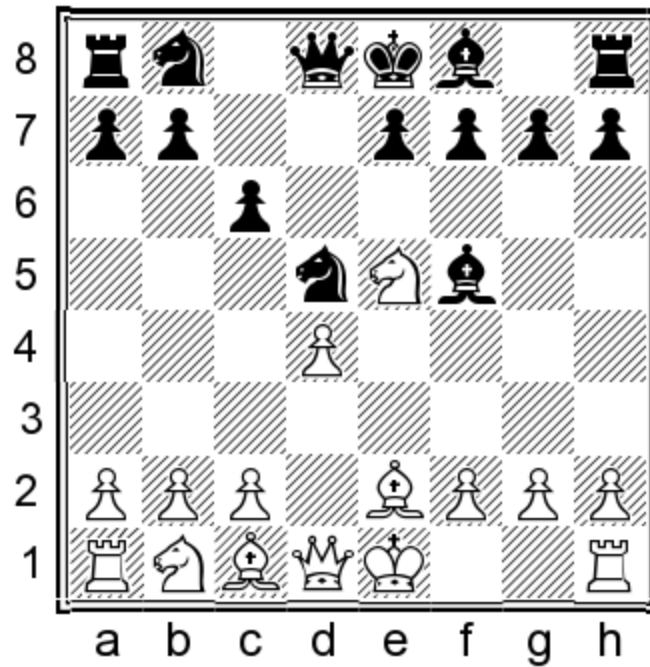
This may be slightly better for White but I think Black has a favorable version compared to lines where the white queen's knight has gone to c3 or where White has managed to eliminate his opponent's light-squared bishop with Nh4xg6.

(back to the text) You may have noticed the difference with the variation 1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.Nf3 dxe5 5.Nxe5 Nd7 6.Nxf7 Kxf7 7.Qh5+ Ke6 8.g3: here the white c-pawn takes away the d6-square from the black king!

(back to the text) 6...g6 transposes into 1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.Nf3 dxe5 5.Nxe5 g6 6.c4 Nb6 – see the relevant section.

(back to the text) As mentioned in the 1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.Nf3 dxe5 5.Nxe5 g6 section, the retreat 6...Nd5-b6 fits better with the fianchetto as it doesn't obstruct the dark-squared bishop.

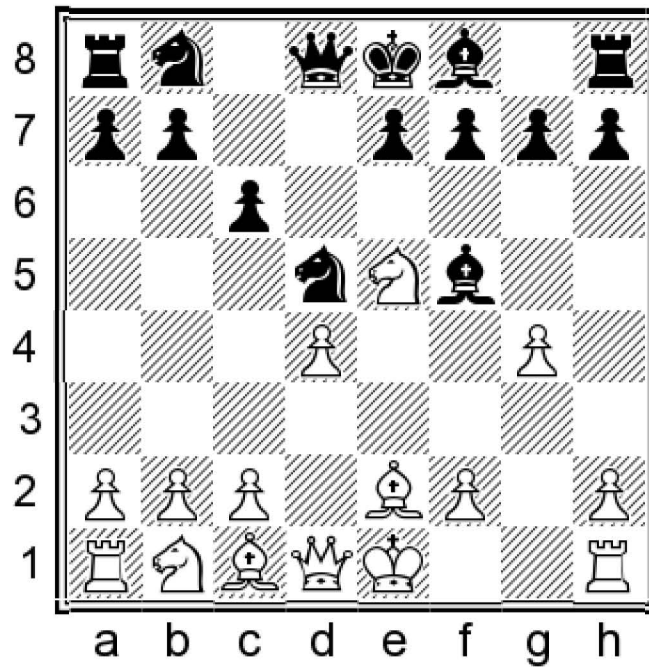
e) 5...c6 6.Be2 (Correspondence Practice) 1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.Nf3 dxe5 5.Nxe5 c6 6.Be2 Bf5



Position after: 6...Bf5

7.0-0

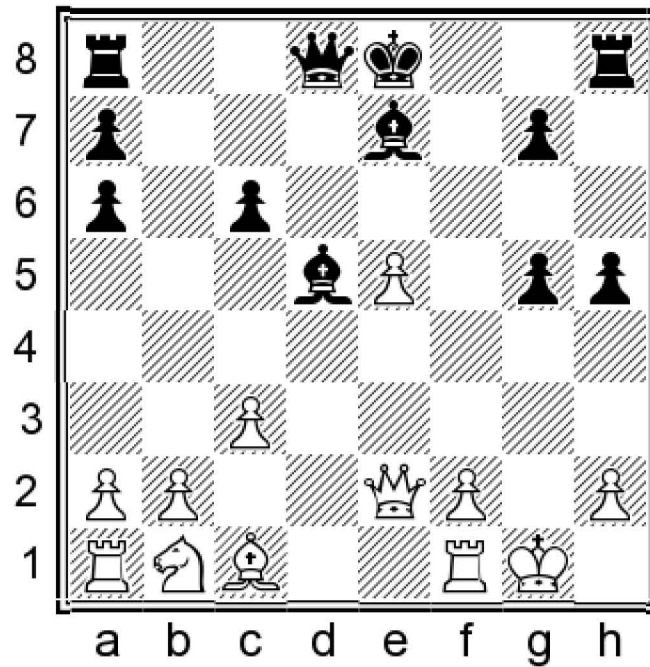
The aggressive push 7.g4 could at first sight suit players who prefer tactical fights, but it also contains positional features.



Position after: 7.g4

A) 7...Be6 Having said “A”, White may feel obliged to say “B” and continue his expansion with either 8.c4 or 8.f4. A more cautious option exists, namely 8.c3, but with the pawn at g4 it’s hard to imagine that the game could develop quietly anyway. Here you have some examples of the three possibilities.

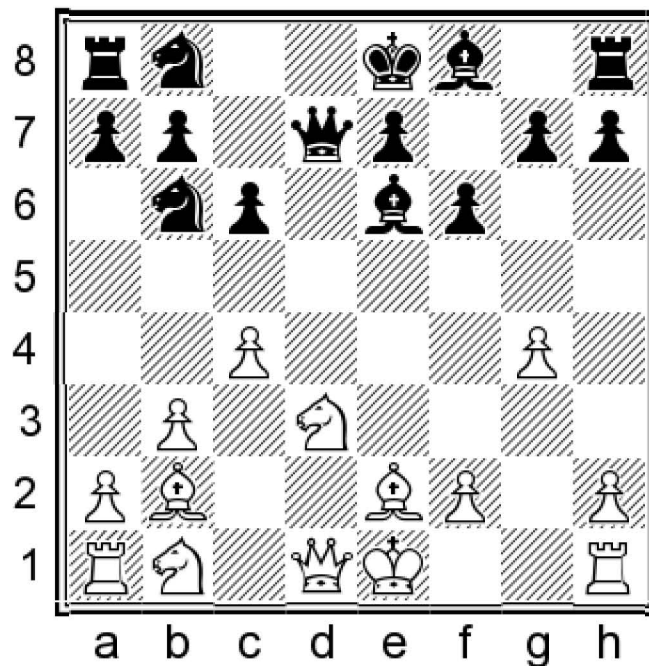
A1) 8.c3 f6 9.Nd3 Na6 Stopping any Nc5. There is obviously room for improvements in what now follows. 10.Nf4 Bf7 11.0-0 e5 12.Nxd5 Bxd5 13.Bxa6 bxa6 14.Qe2 h5 15.g5 Be7 16.dxe5 fxg5



Position after: 16...fxg5

Chaos reigns on the board, Baroin, B (2332) – Legemaat, G (2337) ICCF email 2009.

A2) 8.c4 Nb6 9.b3 f6 10.Nd3 Qxd4 Black must take up the gauntlet, otherwise he will suffer from a spatial disadvantage for nothing. 11.Bb2 This position has been tested quite a few times and it looks like White has got decent compensation for the invested pawn, but chances are shared. 11...Qd7! [11...Qd8?! 12.Nc3 Na6 13.Qd2 Qc7 14.0-0-0 0-0-0 15.Qe3 Bf7 16.Ne4 Kb8 17.f4© Cilloniz Razzeto, A (2379) – Jensen, K (2241) ICCF email 2011]



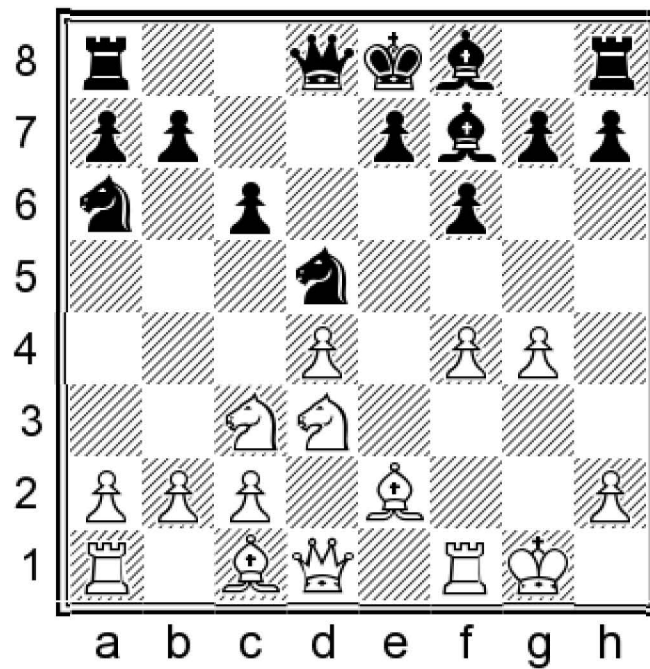
Position after: 11...Qd7!

A2.1) I cast some doubts on 12.h4?! Na6 [12...h5!?] 13.h5, as played in the recent encounter Conterno, D (2333) – MacTilstra, I (2347) ICCF email 2017. Indeed, pushing the h-pawn is time-consuming, while Black will follow an easy developing scheme: ...0-0-0, ...Bf7 and then ...e7-e5.

A2.2) After 12.Nc5 Qxd1+ 13.Bxd1 Black would calmly retreat 13...Bc8 and expel the white knight next. Without queens, any white initiative is likely to evaporate rather fast.

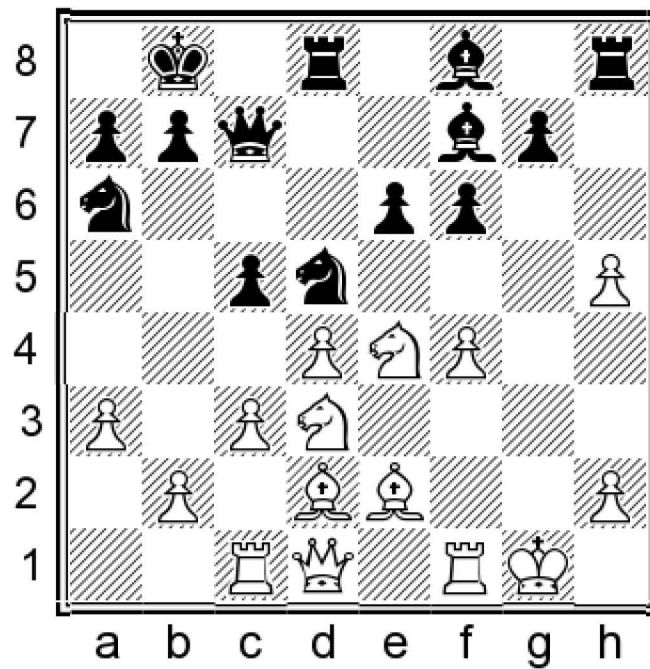
A2.3) 12.Nc3 Na6 Bergmann, M (2433) – Van Seben, E (2426) LSS email 2010. The black position is cramped for the moment, but whether the compensation is fully sufficient is another question.

A3) 8.f4 f6 9.Nd3 Bf7 10.0-0 Na6 11.Nc3



Position after: 11.Nc3

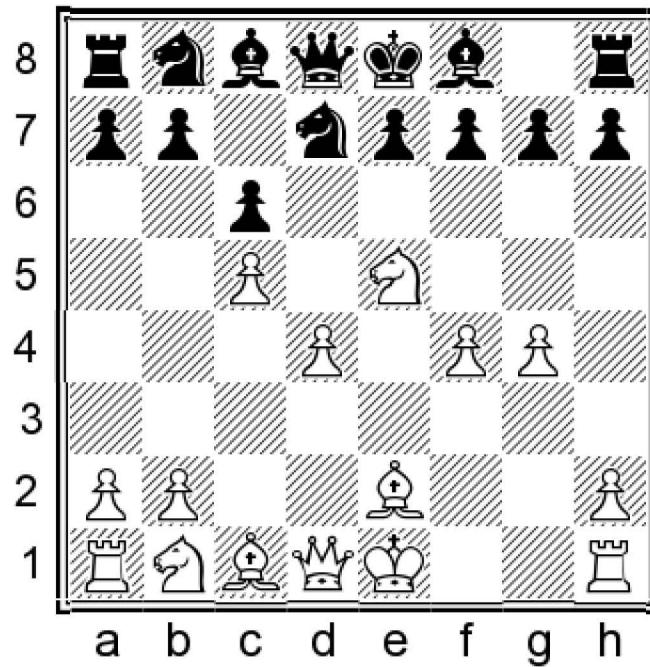
This looks like a critical position, where Black has to make up his mind between several acceptable continuations. Besides 11...h5 and 11...Nxc3 12.bxc3 g6 from the 2004 correspondence game Fleischanderl, F – Alvarez, R, the solid 11...e6 has also been tried. 12.Ne4 Qb6 13.c3 [13.Ndf2 0-0-0∞] 13...0-0-0 14.a3 h5 15.gxh5 Qc7 16.Bd2 c5 17.Rc1 Kb8



Position after: 17...Kb8

A draw was already agreed in Engelhard, C (2313) – Eastoe, L (2349) ICCF email 2018. Black seems alright after 7.g4 from a theoretical standpoint and he often has more active options than after a quieter white approach.

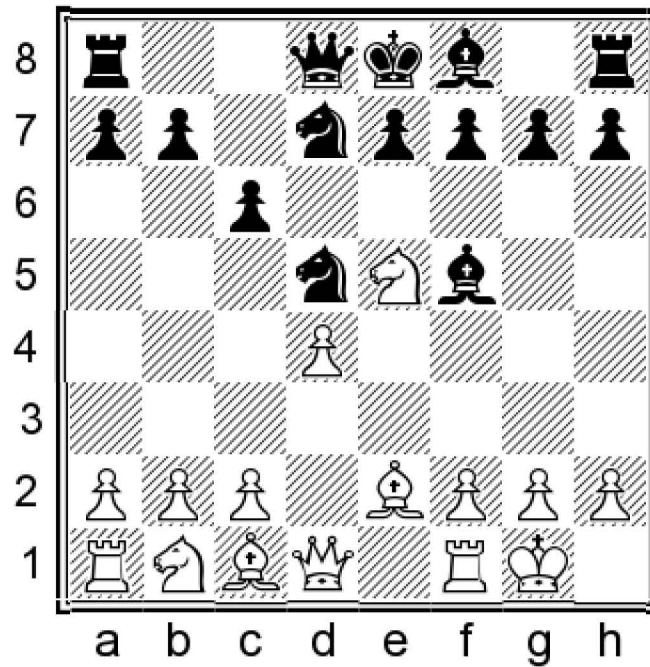
B) Although Black doesn't need to go all the way back to c8, 7...Bc8 deserves attention too, one merit of that move being that it doesn't block the e-pawn. 8.c4 Nb6 9.c5 N6d7 [9...Nd5!?] 10.f4



Position after: 10.f4

10...e6 We are following Schulz, V (2486) – Sprenger, E (2440) ICCF email 2003. [Perhaps Black should have tried 10...Nxe5 11.fxe5 Be6. In the event of the inferior 11.dxe5? Qxd1+³ White would have problems with his c5-pawn following 12...e6 and 13...Nd7, since after b2-b4 comes ...a7-a5!.] 11.Be3 Nxe5 12.fxe5 b6 13.Nd2 bxc5 14.dxc5² White has the obvious idea of jumping Ne4-d6.

7...Nd7



Position after: 7...Nd7

Another important crossroads where White is spoilt for choice.

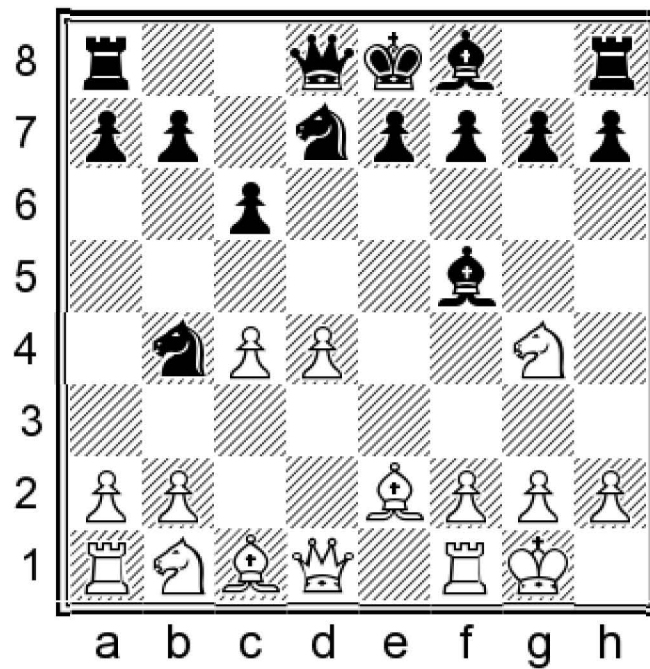
I will not dig too deeply into each available option since there are too many of them!

8.Nf3

A) 8.Bd3 has been played in a few games, but moving the bishop again only two moves after 6.Be2 makes a strange impression.

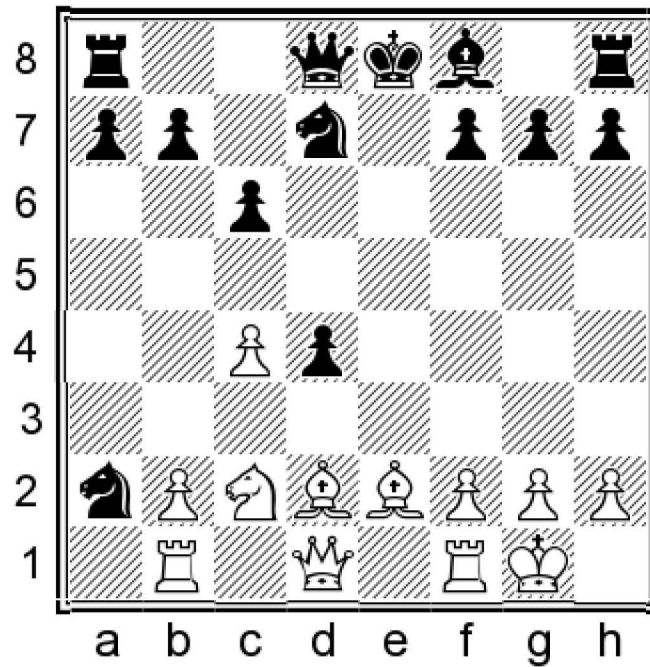
B) 8.f4 e6 9.a3 f6 [9...g5!?] 10.Nf3 Bd6 11.Nh4² Calhau, E (2428) – Siewert, W (2457) ICCF email 2003. White may be slightly for choice but one shouldn't underestimate the potential weaknesses that f2-f4 left in his camp.

C) 8.c4 seems to give White some initiative in all lines. 8...Nb4 9.Ng4



Position after: 9.Ng4

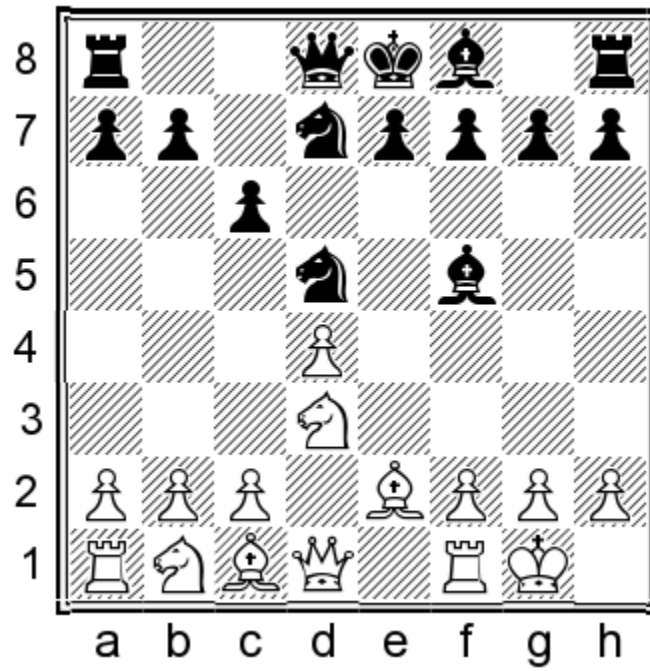
9...e5 [9...Nc2 10.Ne3 Nxe3 11.Bxe3 e6 12.d5 and the white pieces were better placed for the opening of the position in Dunlop, G (2300) – Cumming, D (2319) ICCF email 2012.] 10.Ne3 This happened in Kotlyanskiy, E (2482) – Bendig, F (2289) LSS email 2008. With his last move White invites the coming complications, which eventually turn in his favor. 10...Bxb1 11.Rxb1 Nxa2 12.Bd2 exd4 13.Nc2 [13.Nf5!?!]



Position after: 13.Nc2

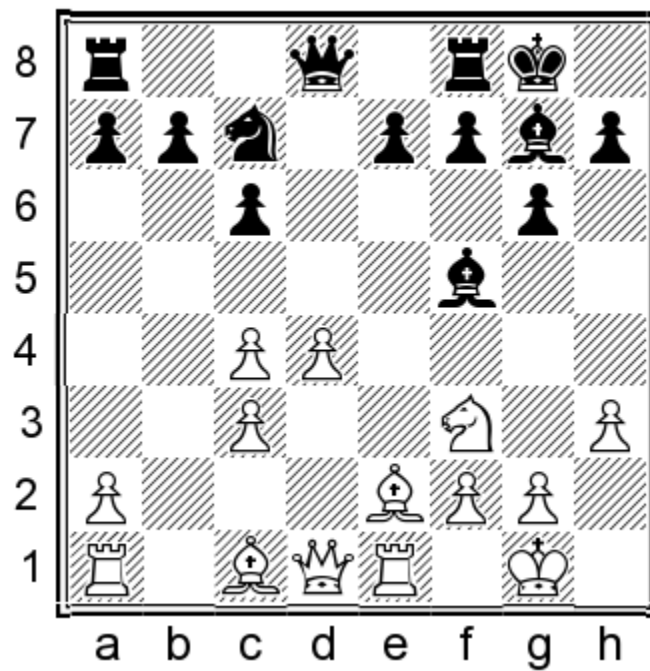
Now all alternatives leave White with ample compensation for his missing pawns. 13...Be7 [13...Nc5 14.Bg4,; 13...Qb6 14.c5 Bxc5 15.Bc4 d3 16.Qe1+± Black's best now is to allow Ba5, which means a queen sacrifice.] 14.Re1 Nc5 [14...c5 15.Ra1 Nb4 16.Nxb4 cxb4 17.Bf3,] 15.Bg4,

D) Retreating the knight to d3, on the other hand, looks more interesting. A few examples follow. 8.Nd3



Position after: 8.Nd3

D1) 8...g6 9.c4 Nc7 10.Nc3 Bg7 11.Ne1 Nf6 12.Nf3 0-0 13.h3 Ne4
14.Re1 Nxc3 15.bxc3²

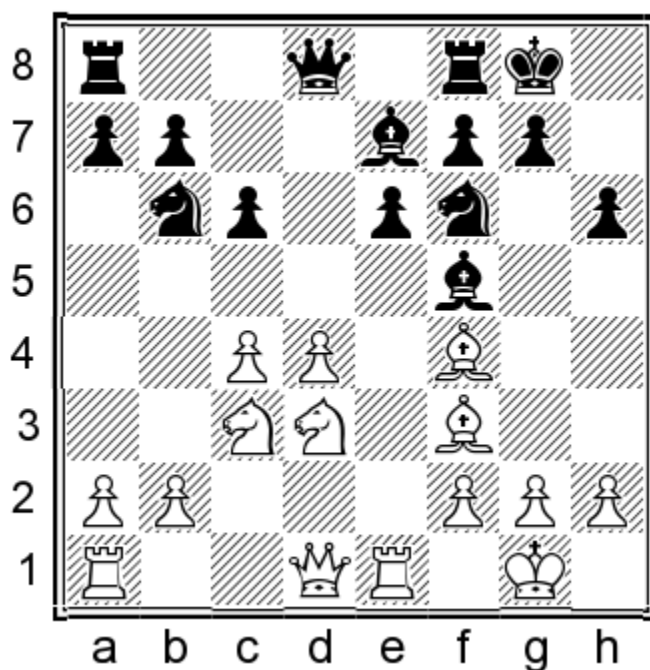


Position after: 15.bxc3²

Hartl, H (2495) – Belanoff, S (2278) LSS email 2010. Once again, see Fritz – Van Seben in 8...e6, where White gladly accepts doubled c-pawns in order to get more dynamism in the middlegame.

D2) It's a matter of taste but the more traditional 8...e6 is fine too. 9.c4 N5f6 10.Bf4 Be7 11.Nc3 0-0 12.Re1 h6

D2.1) 13.Bf3 from Istomin, S (2178) – Van Seben, E (2425) LSS email 2011, has a serious drawback. 13...Nb6.

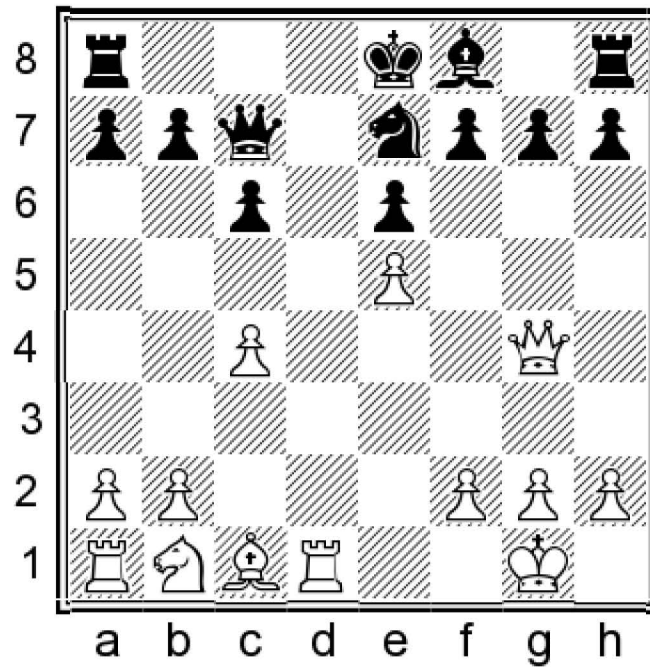


Position after: 13...Nb6

Both the c4- and d4-pawns are under attack and the only convenient way to deal with that, Nd3-e5, permits ...Nfd7 which eases Black's position. 14.g4 Bh7 15.Ne5 Nfd7=

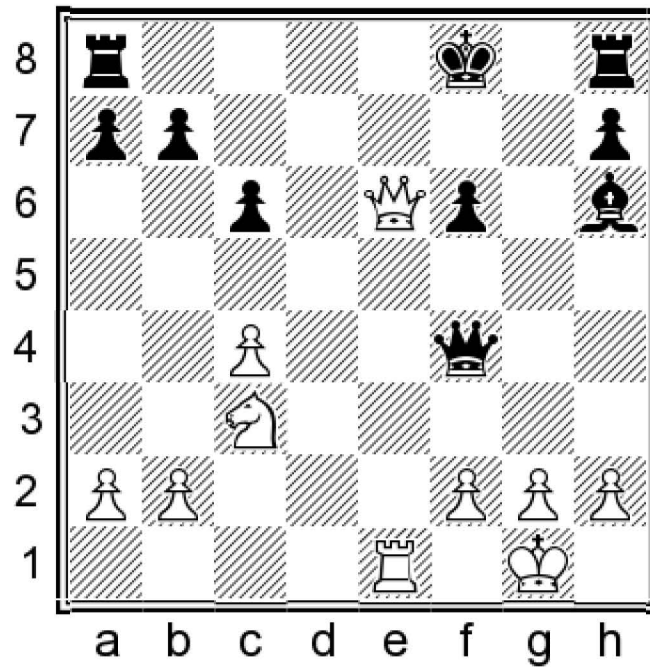
D2.2) 13.h3 Re8 14.Bh2 Ne4 15.Bg4 Nxc3 16.bxc3 Bxg4 17.Qxg4 c5²
Fritz, M (2329) – Van Seben, E (2425) LSS email 2011.

E) 8.Bg4 Bxg4 9.Qxg4 e6 10.Rd1 Nxe5 11.dxe5 Qc7 12.c4 Ne7



Position after: 12...Ne7

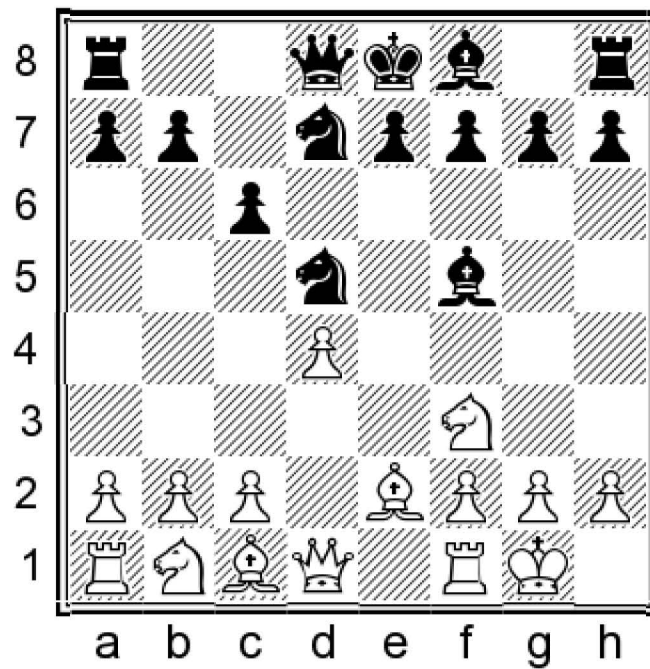
This position was reached in Marczell, P (2533) – Stull, N (2576) ICCF email 2011. At first glance White should be better, but whichever way he protects his e5-pawn his opponent will get counterplay. 13.Bf4 Ng6 14.Nc3 f5 15.exf6 Nxf4 16.Rd4 gxf6 17.Re1 Bh6 18.Rxf4 Qxf4 19.Qxe6+ Kf8=



Position after: 19...Kf8=

Despite being a whole rook down White has enough compensation here, but not more, which explains why two experienced correspondence players had to eventually settle for a draw. Naturally all this wasn't forced after Black's 12th move, but this game may serve to illustrate some of the black resources.

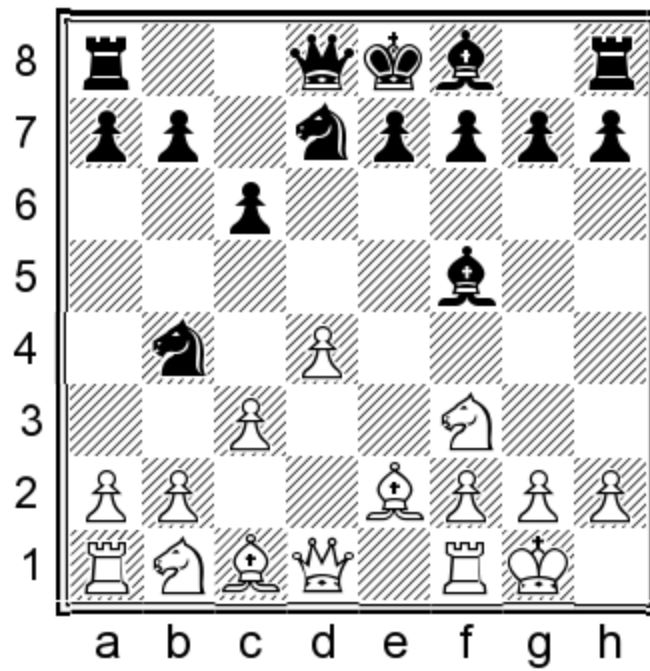
After 8.Nf3 we have arrived at another crossroads.



Position after: 8.Nf3

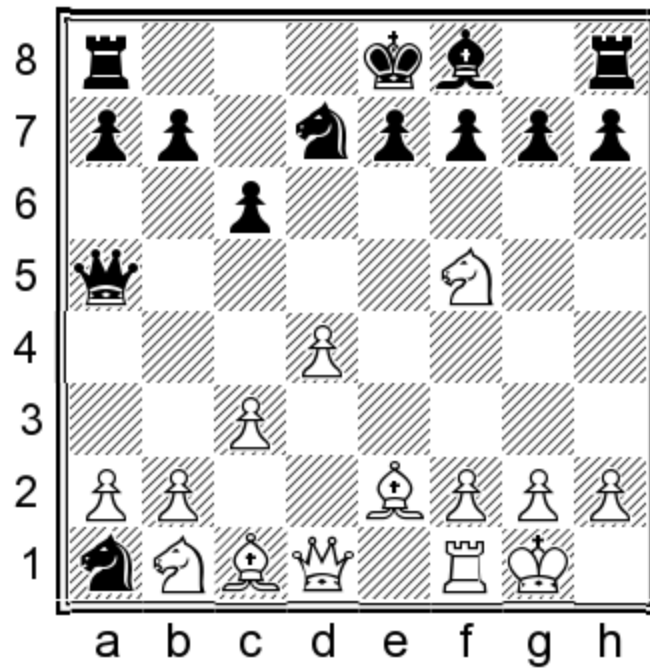
8...Qc7

A) 8...Nb4?! Moving the knight again without being prompted by c2-c4 is of course suspicious. 9.c3! [stronger than 9.Na3 Even, F (2385) – Legemaat, G (2345) ICCF email 2009]



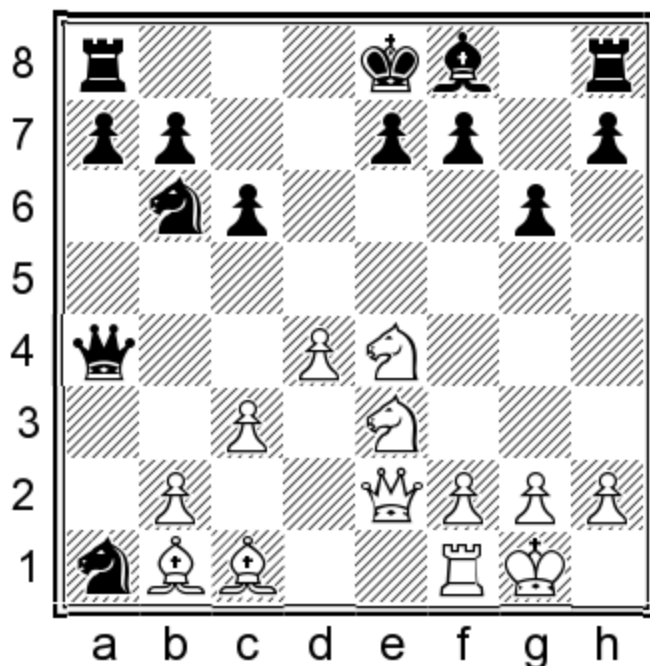
Position after: 9.c3!

A1) 9...Nc2 10.Nh4 Nxa1 11.Nxf5 Qa5



Position after: 11...Qa5

Starting the rescue operation for the cornered soldier. Black gains a tempo by hitting the enemy horse on f5, but that won't solve all his problems. 12.Bd3 Qxa2 13.Nd2 Nb6 14.Ne3 g6 [Rr 14...e6 15.b3.] 15.Bb1 Qa6 16.Ne4 Qa4 17.Qe2

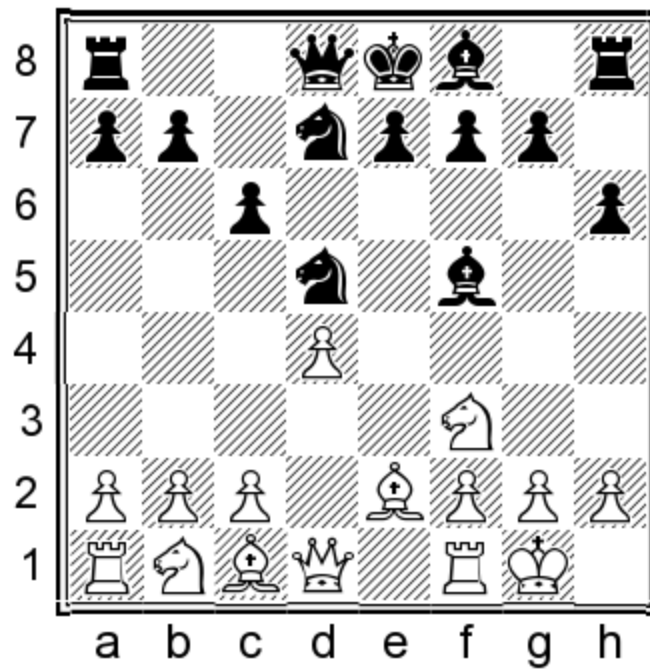


Position after: 17.Qe2

17...e6 [17...Nb3 gets hit by the cute refutation 18.Nd6+!! exd6 19.Nd5+ Kd7 20.Qg4++-] 18.Ng4+- White won nine moves later in Penafiel Lopez, J (2350) – Legemaat, G (2337) ICCF email 2009.

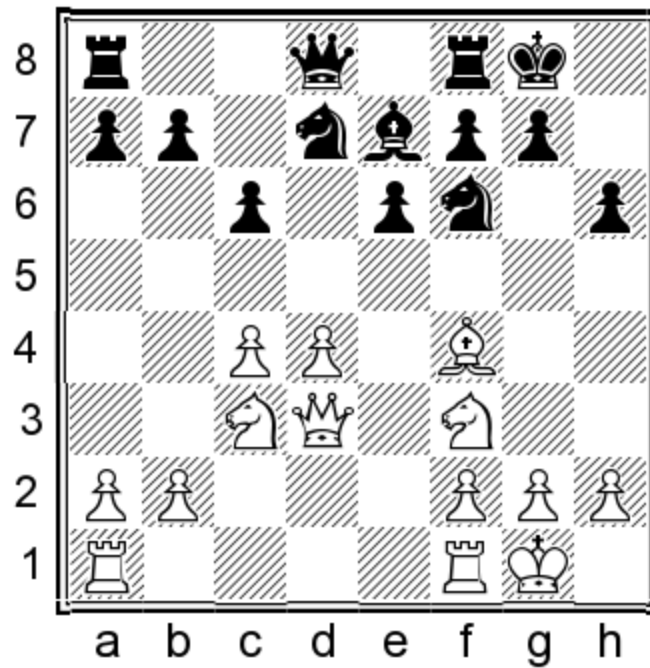
A2) Maybe 9...Bc2 is a bit safer. 10.Qd2 Bxb1 11.Rxb1 [11.a3!?] 11...Nxa2 12.d5©

B) 8...h6 This ambitious move is designed to avoid the trade Nh4xf5 (or Nxg6, if the bishop has withdrawn to that square).



Position after: 8...h6

B1) 9.Bd3 Bxd3 10.Qxd3 e6 11.c4 N5f6 12.Bf4 Be7 13.Nc3 0-0²

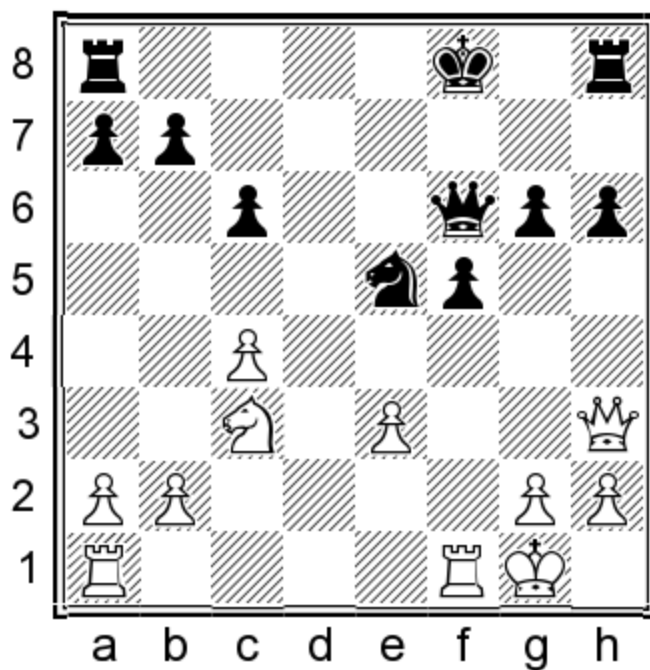


Position after: 13...0-0²

Alvebring, M (2286) – Bishop, N (2376) IECG email 2006. White has more space. A natural plan for him now consists of putting his rooks in the center and preparing for the d4-d5 break.

B2) 9.c4 Nb4 [9...N5f6 White can now allow his opponent a rather smooth development with ...e6 followed by ...Be7, open up the game at once with d4-d5, or play d5 after the inclusion of 10.Nc3 e6. With the black king still stuck in the center, I believe the first approach is not the most logical.

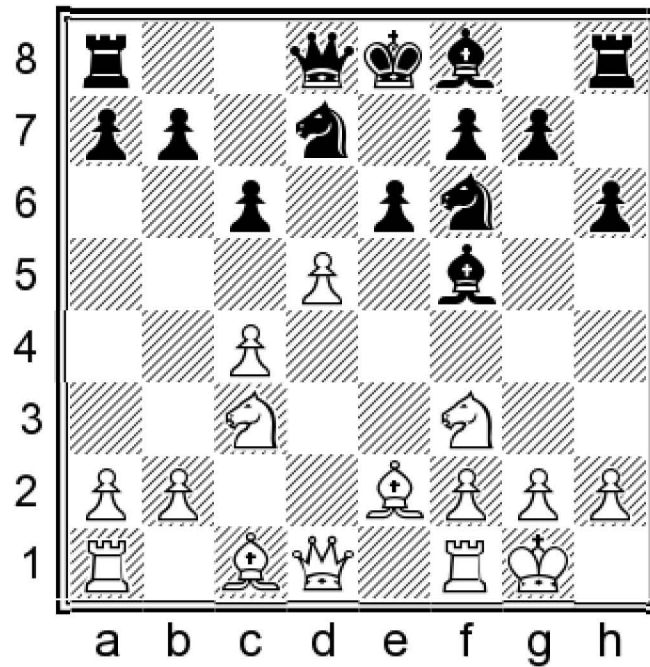
10.d5 e5 Black has no choice as he needs to develop, even if that involves serious risks. 11.dxe6 fxe6 12.Nd4 Bc5 13.Nxf5 exf5 14.Bh5+ Kf8 15.Nc3 Nxh5 16.Qxh5 Qf6 17.Be3 Bxe3 18.fxe3 g6 19.Qh3 Ne5∞



Position after: 19...Ne5∞

Kazantsev, R (2301) – Reichert, T (2328) ICCF email 2008. This looks pretty dangerous for Black but he held in that particular game.

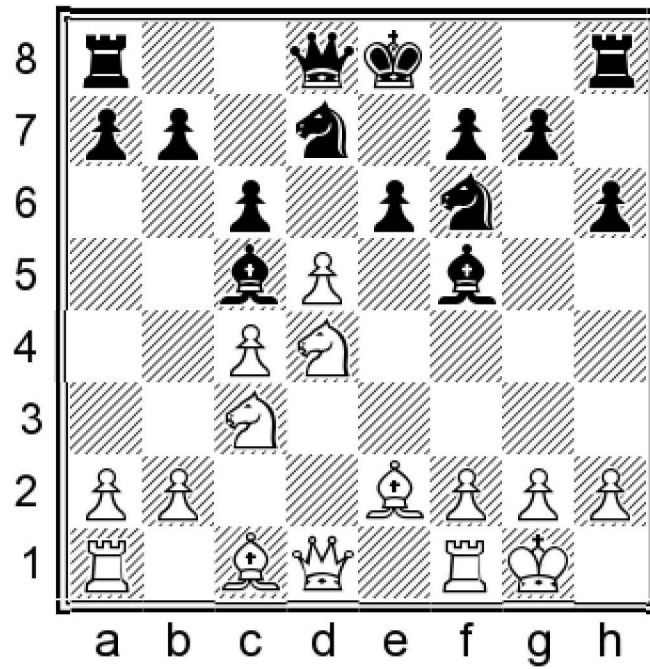
10.Nc3 e6 11.d5!



Position after: 11.d5!

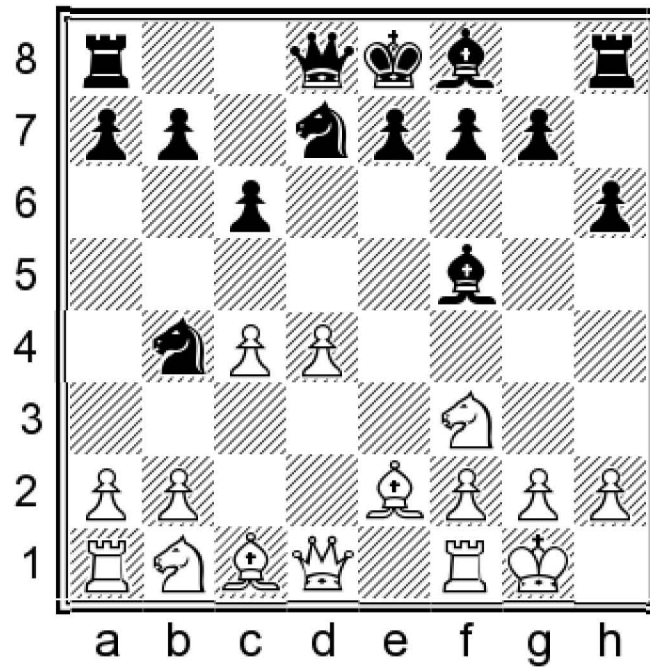
This advance seems to assure White of an edge even if Black managed to split the point in all the high-level correspondence games that follow.

11...Bc5 [It is not obvious which side will benefit from the intermediate swap 11...cxd5 12.cxd5, for instance 12...Bc5 13.dxe6 Bxe6 14.Nd4² Anderskewitz, R (2272) – Van Seben, E (2426) LSS email 2010, and Black loses his pair of bishops.] 12.Nd4 [12.dxc6 bxc6 and now either 13.Na4!? Bubir, A (2439) – Van Seben, E (2404) LSS email 2010 or 13.Nd4 Dolgov, I (2237) – Van Seben, E (2401) LSS email 2010, with the usual ² assessment.]



Position after: 12.Nd4

12...cxd5 [Or 12...Bxd4 13.Qxd4² Asquith, J (2426) – Donnelly, M (2486) ICCF email 2008.] 13.cxd5 0-0 14.dxe6 Bxe6 15.Nxe6 fxe6 16.Na4² Cernovsky, K (2331) – Lloyd, G (2323) ICCF email 2012.

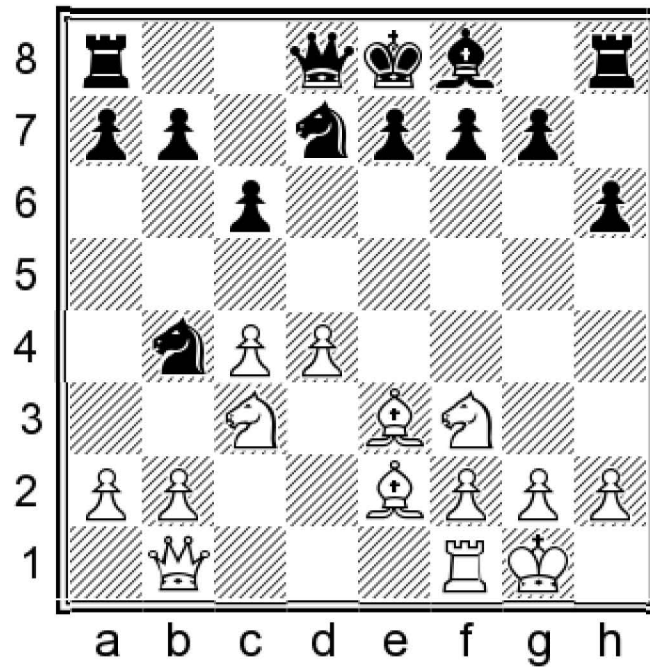


Position after: 9...Nb4

B2.1) 10.a3 Nc2 11.Ra2 Nxd4 12.Qxd4 Bxb1 13.Ra1 Bf5 White has obvious compensation for the pawn thanks to his lead in development, although Black held in Ottesen, S (2370) – Hugentobler, P (2451) ICCF email 2005.

B2.2) 10.Ne1 e5 is perhaps a bit worse but fully playable for Black, Tauscher, K (2406) – Raijmaekers, K (2422) Remote email 2013.

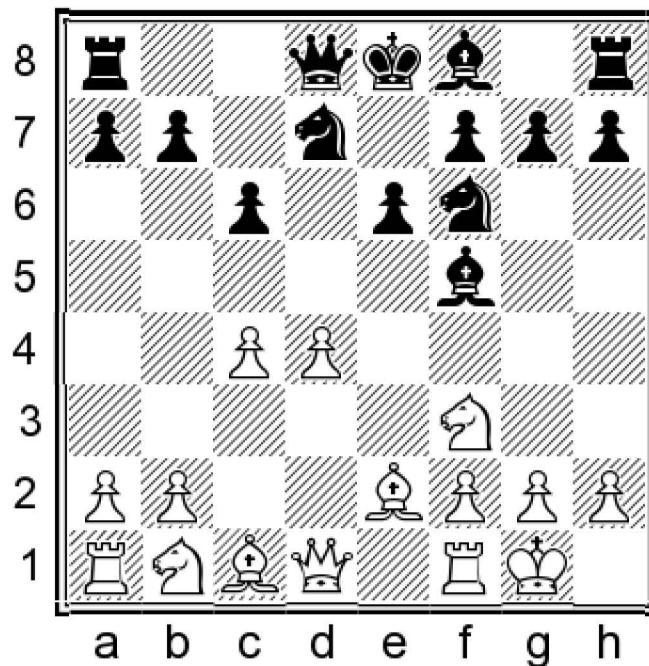
B2.3) 10.Nc3! Nc2 11.Rb1 Nb4 12.Ra1 Nc2 13.Rb1 Nb4 14.Be3 Bxb1 15.Qxb1©



Position after: 15.Qxb1©

15...g6 [In the event of 15...e6 16.a3 Na6 White would open up the position with 17.d5! and get a tremendous initiative] 16.Nh4 Rg8 17.a3 Na6 18.Rd1 Other moves have been tried too but this seems to be the most recent. White pushed d4-d5 next and scored a victory in Horwitz, D (2333) – Ellis, L (2287) ICCF email 2014.

C) 8...e6 9.c4 [As we have seen. the precautionary 9.a3 is superfluous.]
9...N5f6



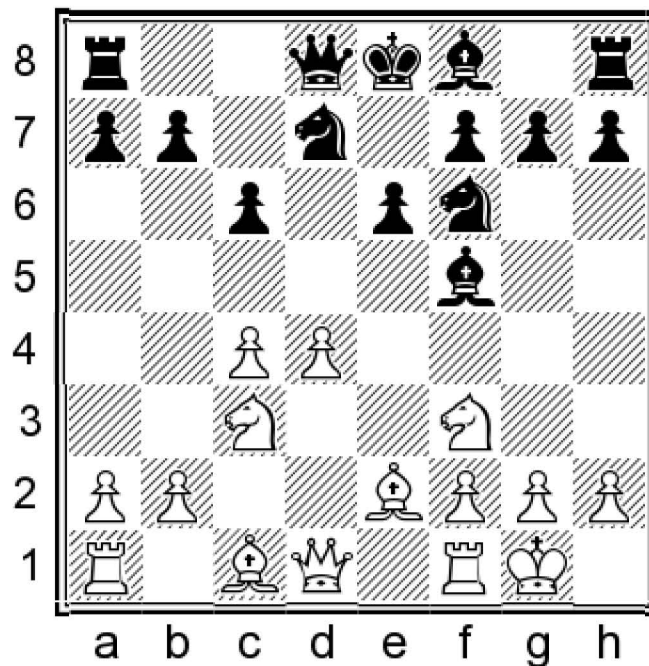
Position after: 9...N5f6

Black gets a sounder game this way than he does with an early ...h7-h6, but he remains a bit worse. Here are some possible follow-ups.

C1) 10.Nh4 Bxb1 11.Rxb1 Bd6 12.g3 Barnsley, A (2509) – Stull, N (2584) ICCF email 2009. White has the traditional edge associated with the two bishops.

C2) 10.Bf4 Qb6 11.Qc1 Be7 12.Nc3² Mueller Alves, M (2333) – Van Seben, E (2425) LSS email 2011. White may get some action going with a subsequent c4-c5 followed by b2-b4-b5, but this way he would concede the d5-square. So far Black has not needed to part with his light-squared bishop or deal with d4-d5, so the opening looks like a small success for him.

C3) 10.Nc3



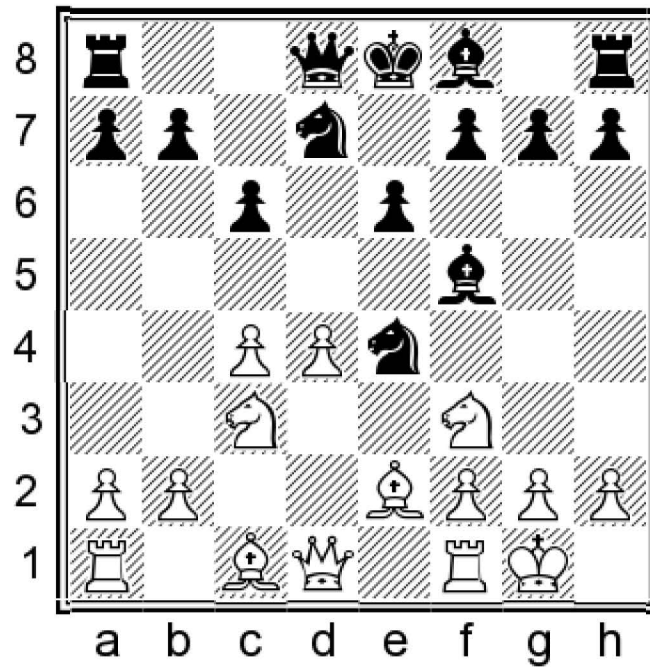
Position after: 10.Nc3

Black has several possible answers.

C3.1) 10...Bb4!? Priepke, W (2467) – Grayland, S (2404) ICCF email 2012.

C3.2) 10...Qc7 11.Nh4 Bg6 12.g3 Horwitz, D (2368) – Legemaat, G (2326) ICCF email 2010. This is a bit different from the 10.Nh4 lines because another trade is likely to follow, namely Nxc6 hxc6. The evaluation, though, remains the same.

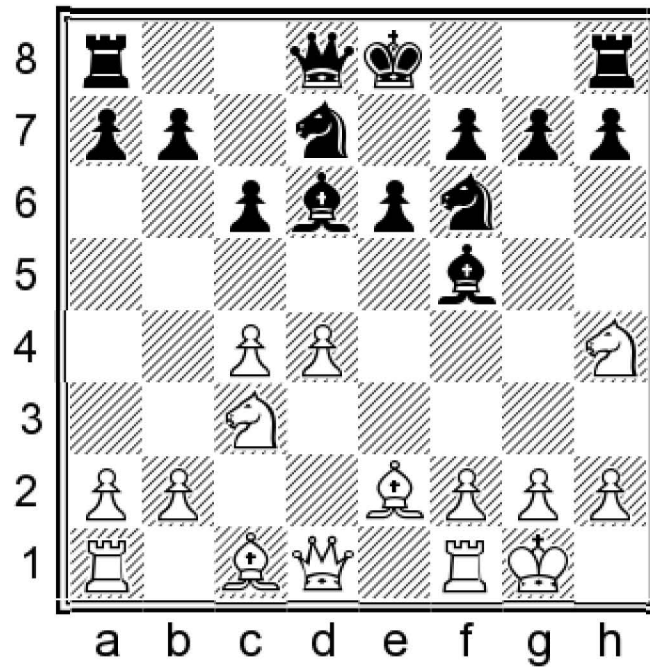
C3.3) Trading knights with 10...Ne4 is also playable and it has been tried by an expert of the 5...c6 line, Van Seben, who actually had a correspondence debate with Mueller Alves.



Position after: 10...Ne4

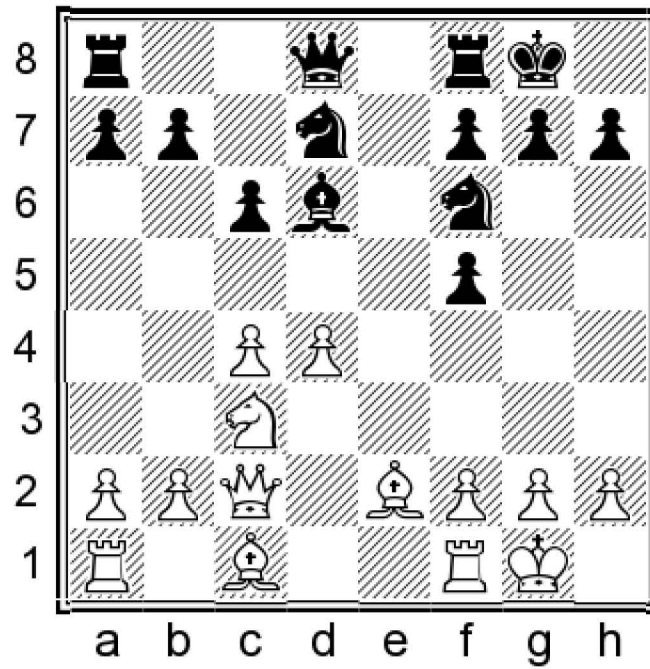
Black managed to share the point in all the games of that match quoted before and after this note. 11.Qb3 This keeps the game complicated. [Simpler, and equally acceptable, is 11.Bd3 Nxc3 12.bxc3 Bxd3 13.Qxd3 Chamaev, A (2231) – Van Seben, E (2413) LSS email 2012.] In both these cases White is not concerned about getting doubled c-pawns, as his d4-pawn is fortified and he may be able to use the b-file later on. 11...Nxc3 [Or 11...Qc7 12.Nh4 and so on, Mueller Alves, M (2316) – Van Seben, E (2383) LSS email 2012, where peace was signed only 10 moves later.] 12.bxc3 b6 13.Bf4 Be7 14.h3 0-0 15.a4 c5 ½-½ (32) Mueller Alves, M (2347) – Van Seben, E (2426) LSS email 2011.

C3.4) 10...Bd6 11.Nh4



Position after: 11.Nh4

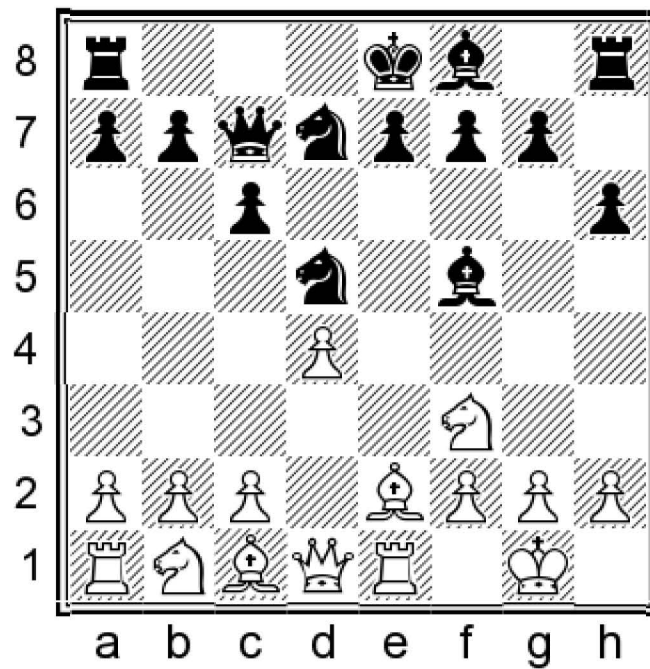
11...Bg6 This move, seen in Watson, A (2395) – Da Lima Neto, P (2345) ICCF email 2009, is a bit more academic than 11...0-0, with which Black probably experimented a bit earlier on or even simultaneously. At any rate, in Schubert, W (2341) – Da Lima Neto, P (2345) ICCF email 2009 he soon found himself in trouble (after 11...0-0) following 12.Nxf5 exf5 13.Qc2



Position after: 13.Qc2

13...f4?! [13...g6²] 14.Qf5! g6 15.Qg5 Nh5 16.Qxd8 Rfxd8 17.Bxh5 gxh5 White holds an obvious edge in the ending.

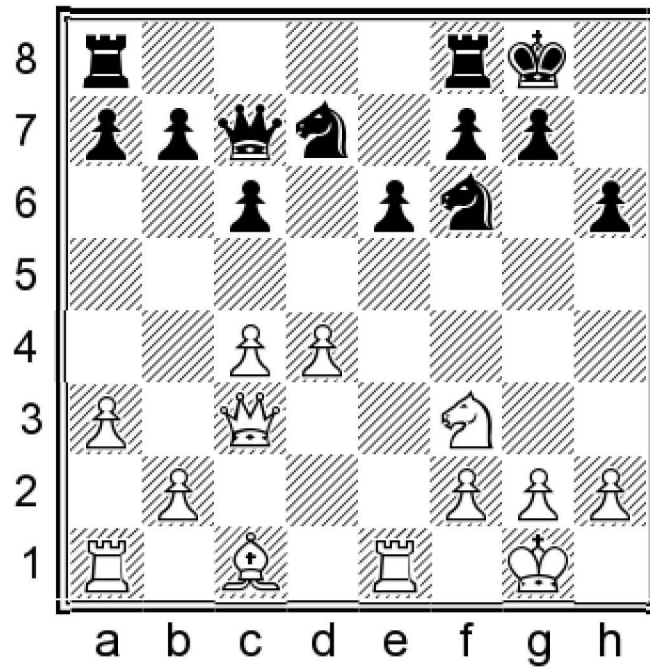
9.Re1 h6



Position after: 9...h6

10.a3

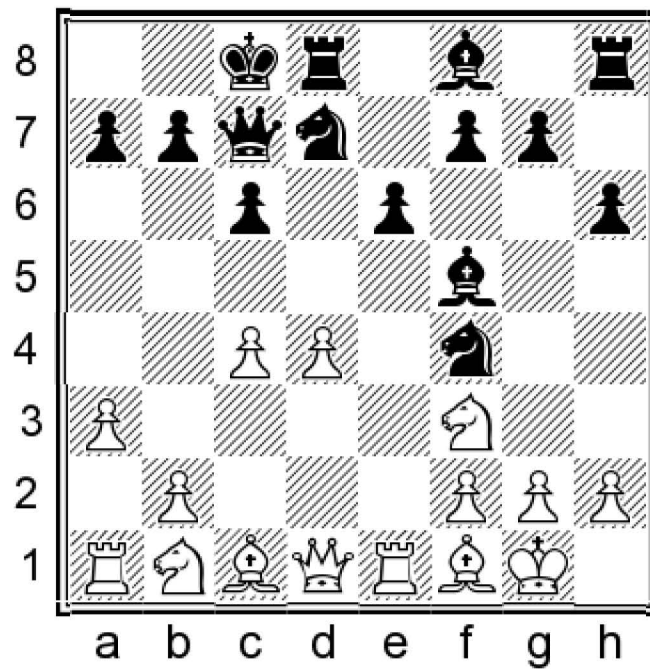
10.Bd3 looks good enough for a slight pull too. 10...Bxd3 11.Qxd3 e6 12.c4 N5f6 13.Nc3 Bb4 [Maybe 13...0-0-0 was the way to prevent d4-d5.] 14.a3 Bxc3 15.Qxc3 0-0



Position after: 15...0-0

White enjoys an enduring plus, retaining both a space advantage and the better minor piece, Biedermann, T (2441) – Zmoky, A (2496) ICCF 2014.

10...e6 11.c4 Nf4 12.Bf1 0-0-0



Position after: 12...0-0-0

We are following Spitz, C (2533) – Kochetov, D (2414) ICCF email 2003, where Black surprisingly went so wrong that he preferred to give up after only six more moves!

13.Nc3 g5

13...Nf6!?

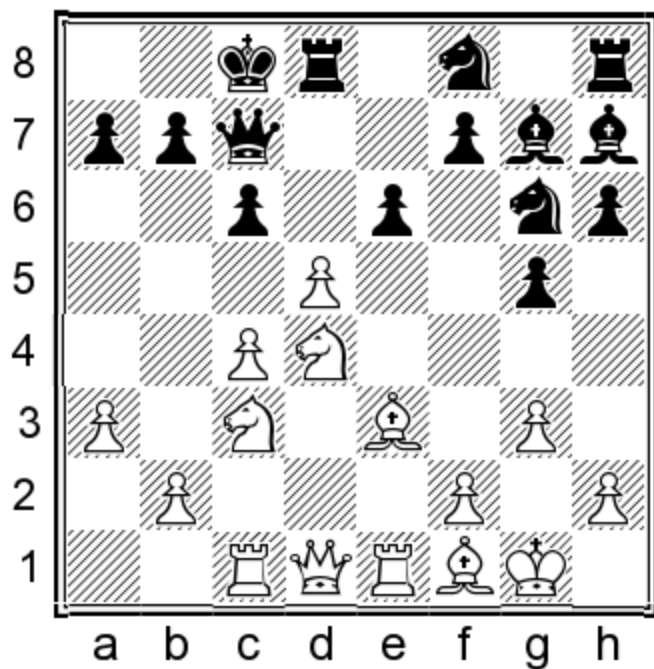
14.d5 Bg7?

14...Bg4 remained playable for Black according to the computer.

15.Nd4

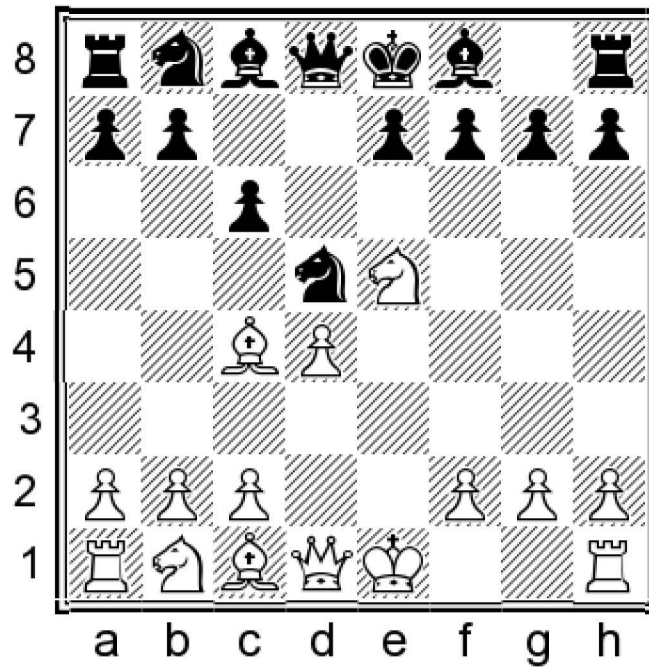
15.d6! was even stronger.

15...Bh7 16.g3 Ng6 17.Be3 Ndf8 18.Rc1+-



Position after: 18.Rc1+-

f) 5...c6 6.Bc4 (Correspondence Practice) 1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.Nf3 dxe5 5.Nxe5 c6 6.Bc4

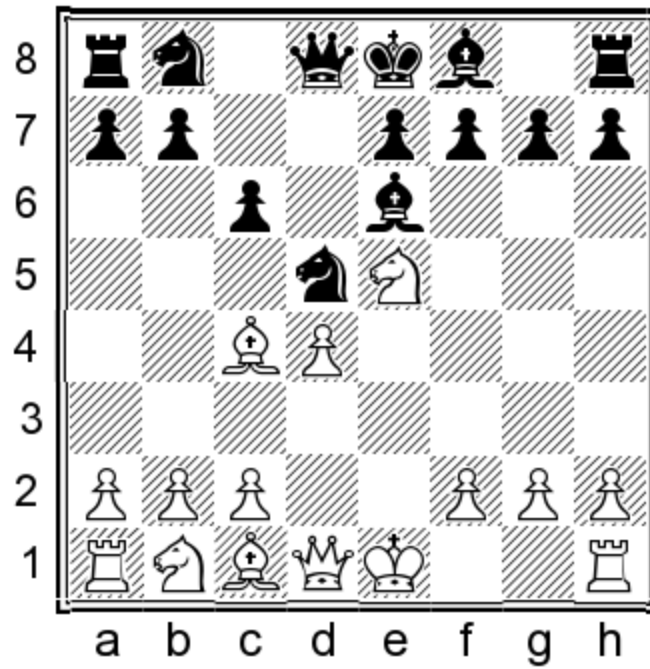


Position after: 6.Bc4

6...Nd7

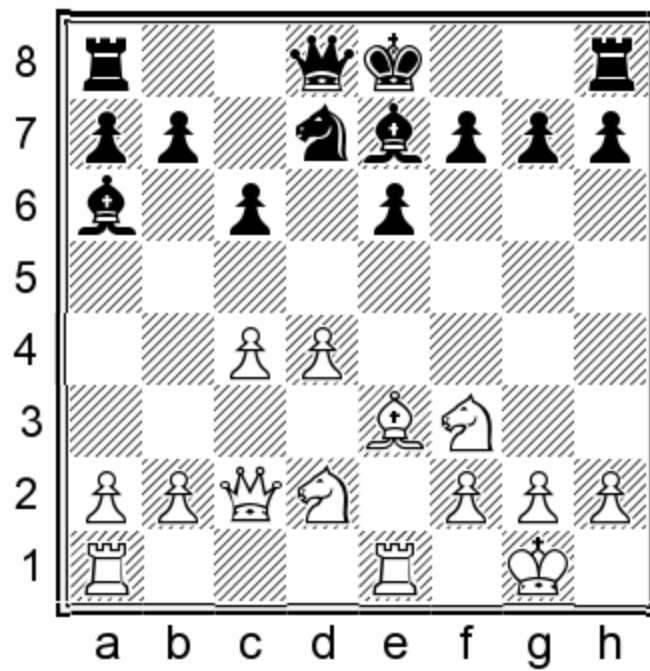
Black's most frequent choice in games between players with an Elo average over 2300.

A) The rare 6...Be6 has pros and cons. On the one hand, if Black decides on a setup including ...g7-g6 anyway, the light-squared bishop could rather go to f5 or g4 in some lines. On the other hand, if after a later ...Nd7 White swaps Nxd7, then ...Qxd7 will see the black pieces more harmoniously placed than after 6...Nd7 7.Nxd7 Bxd7 or Qxd7. And if White prefers to withdraw his knight to f3, Black will have tricks based on ...Ne3 or ...Nc3 followed by ...Bxc4.



Position after: 6...Be6

A1) 7.O-O Nd7 8.Nf3 Ne3 See the comment attached to 6...Be6. 9.Bxe3 Bxc4 10.Re1 e6 11.Nbd2 Ba6 12.c4 Be7 13.Qc2²

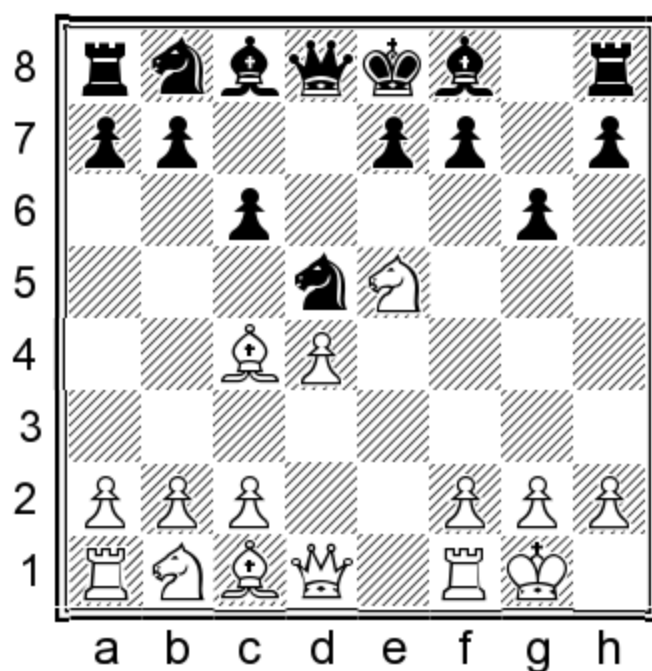


Position after: 13.Qc2²

Black had the advantage of the bishop pair but nonetheless stood a bit worse in McKenzie, C (2309) – Fitzpatrick, S (2354) Arngina email 2002.

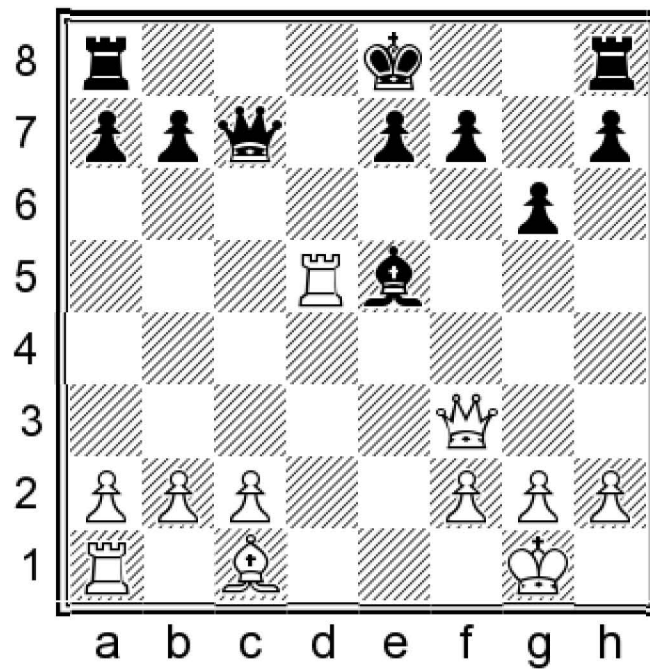
A2) 7.Nd2 Nd7 and now both 8.Nef3 and 8.Ndf3 Novikovas, V (2512) – Fitzpatrick, S (2372) ICCF email 2000 are pretty logical.

B) 6...g6 is likely to transpose into 5...g6. 7.0-0



Position after: 7.0-0

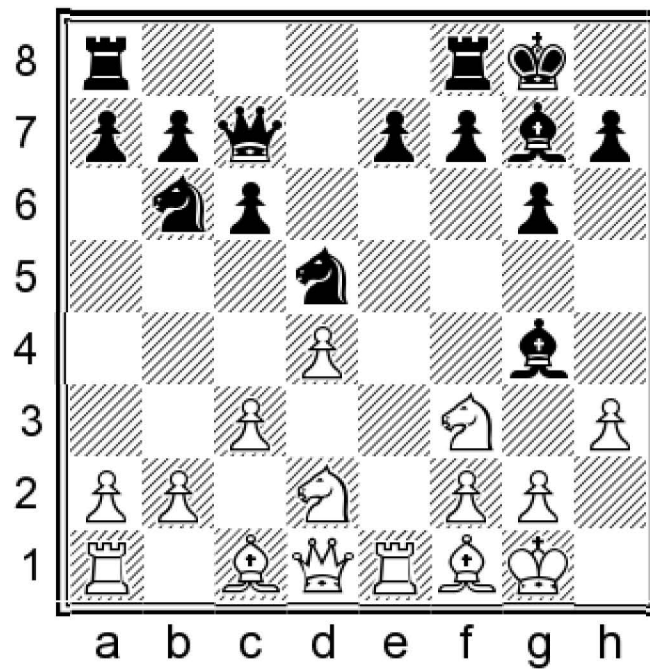
B1) 7...Nd7!? led to mass exchanges in Sychov, A (2279) – Reichert, T (2333) ICCF email 2012, which continued 8.Nc3 Nxe5 9.dxe5 Be6 10.Qf3 Bg7 11.Rd1 Bxe5 12.Nxd5 Bxd5 13.Bxd5 cxd5 14.Rxd5 Qc7.



Position after: 14...Qc7

Now White prevented Black from castling kingside and kept some pull thanks to 15.Bh6! Bxh2+ 16.Kh1 Bd6 17.Rad1 0-0-0 18.Qxf7². Here Black was victim of a rarity: a mis-click in a correspondence game! In place of the intended 18...Qc4, the game concluded 18...Qc5?? 19.Rxc5+ 1-0. Not the nicest way to lose a game!

B2) 7...Bg7 8.Re1 0-0 [On 8...Nd7 White's best is likely to withdraw 9.Nf3 and bet on his space advantage.] 9.c3 Nd7 10.Nf3 N7b6 11.Bf1 Bg4 12.Nbd2 Qc7 13.h3



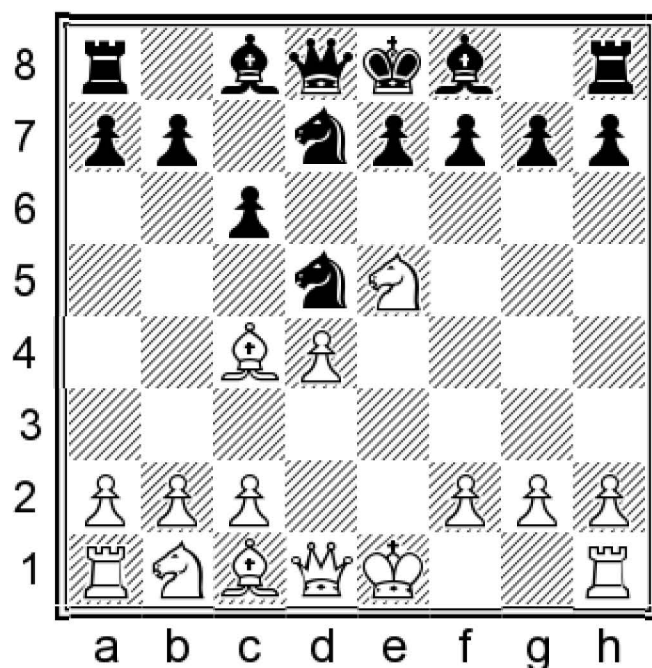
Position after: 13.h3

13...Bf5 [13...Bxf3 14.Nxf3 e6² White had the two bishops, Black a solid position, in Nogler, S (2428) – Rosche, E (2468) Remote email 2012.]

14.Nc4 [14.Ne4!?!; 14.Nb3!?!] 14...Nxc4 15.Bxc4 Rae8 16.Bg5 h6

17.Bh4² Frank, M – Fitzpatrick, S Argentina (email) 1998.

Back to 6...Nd7.



Position after: 6...Nd7

7.Nf3!

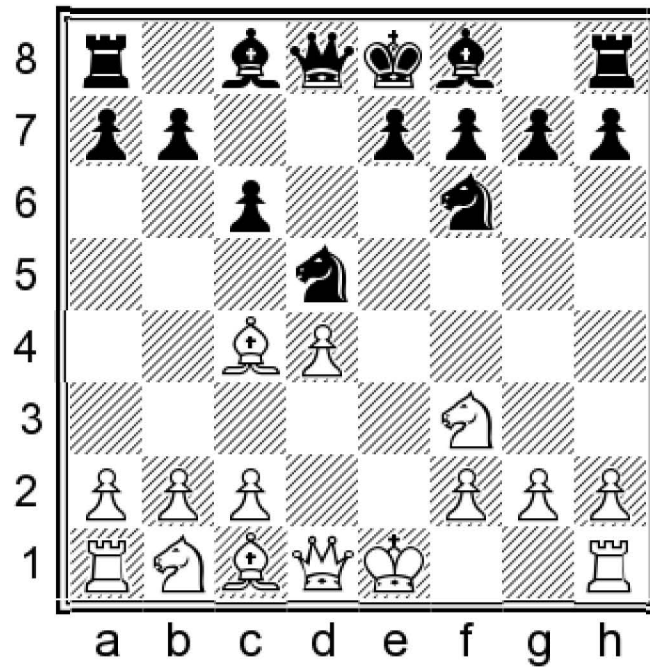
At the risk of repeating myself: the side who enjoys a space advantage should in general refrain from trading pieces. The following alternatives, while not bad, are thus a bit inferior in my opinion: **A)** 7.f4 g6 Siigur, J (2439) – Leutwyler, M (2200) ICCF email 2004.

B) 7.Nxd7 Bxd7 Baranowski, T (2425) – Leutwyler, M (2200) ICCF email 2004.

C) 7.Qf3 Nxe5 8.dxe5 Qc7 9.Bf4 Be6 10.Bg3 h5 11.h3 g5 12.Nd2 Bg7 13.Qe2 0-0-0 14.0-0-0= Saari, K (2361) – Siewert, W (2457) ICCF email 2003.

7...N7f6

7...N7b6 is likely to transpose since moving the bishop in order to push c2-c4 belongs in White's plans anyway.



Position after: 7...N7f6

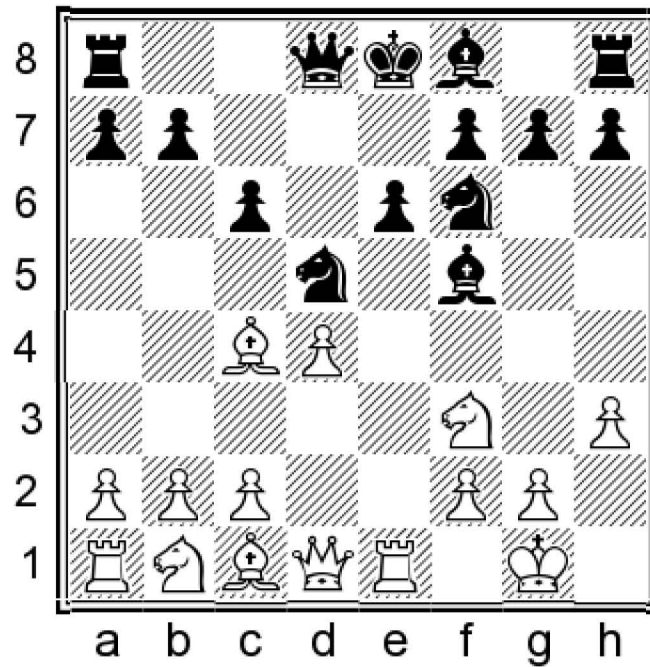
8.h3

8.0-0 Bg4 9.h3 Bh5 10.Be2 e6 11.c4 Nb6 This occurred in De Filippis, F (2438) – Wilhelmi, D (2454) ICCF email 2012, when 12.b3 looks like a less artificial way to parry ...Bxf3 than the game continuation, 12.Qd3.

8...Bf5

Black can also consider 8...b5!?, which creates a weakness on c6 but immunizes his centralized knight against a future c2-c4, since ...bxc4 would follow. 9.Bd3 g6 10.c3 Bg7 11.0-0 0-0 12.Re1 a5 [12...Bf5!?] 13.Ne5² Lucchini, G (2380) – Reichert, T (2372) ICCF email 2007.

9.0-0 e6 10.Re1



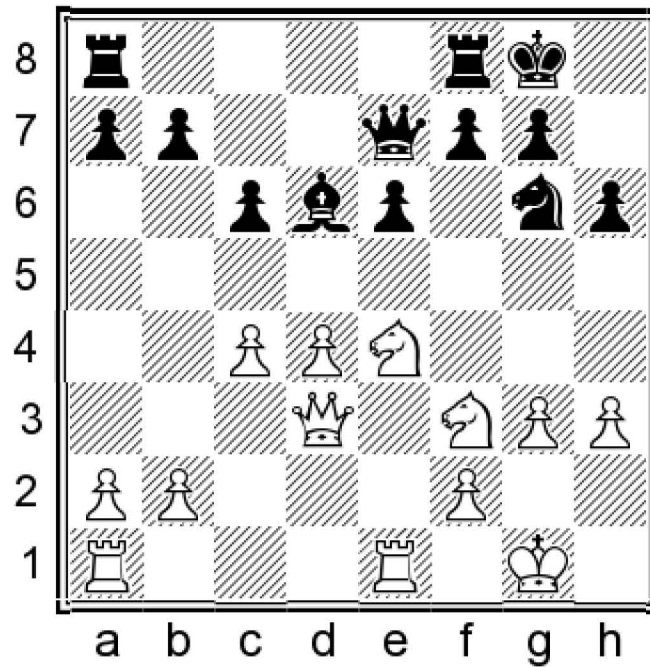
Position after: 10.Re1

10...h6

Or 10...Bd6 when White has to decide between offering a trade of bishops while freeing his c-pawn, with 11.Bd3, and hunting the enemy bishop with a later Nf3-h4.

A) 11.Bf1 0-0 12.Nh4 Ne4 [12...Bg6!?] 13.Nxf5 exf5 14.Nd2 Ndf6[∞] De Blasio, M (2536) – Stull, N (2582) ICCF email 2010.

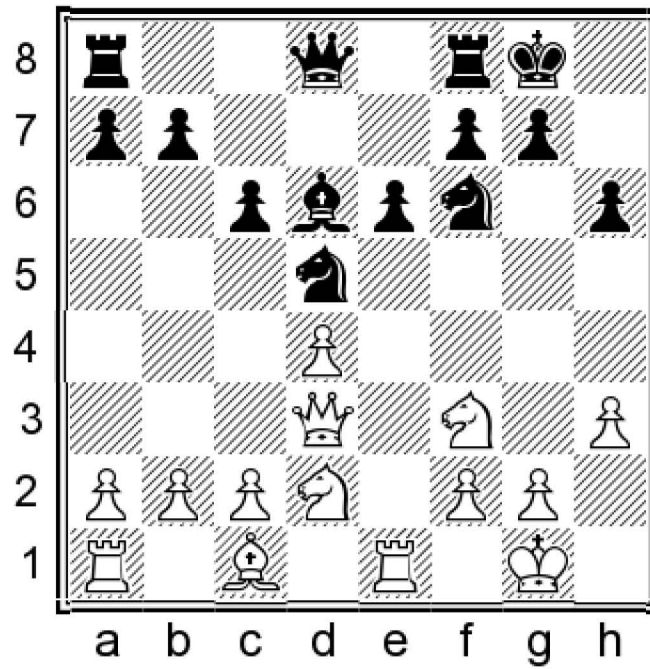
B) 11.Bd3 Bxd3 12.Qxd3 0-0 [12...b5!?] 13.c4 Ne7 14.Bg5 Ng6 15.Nc3 h6 16.Bxf6 Qxf6 17.Ne4 Qe7 18.g3²



Position after: 18.g3²

Silva, M (2319) – Walter, G (2383) ICCF email 2009. White stands a bit better here because the knight on g6 is restricted, but it isn't that much really.

11.Bd3 Bxd3 12.Qxd3 Bd6 13.Nbd2 0-0

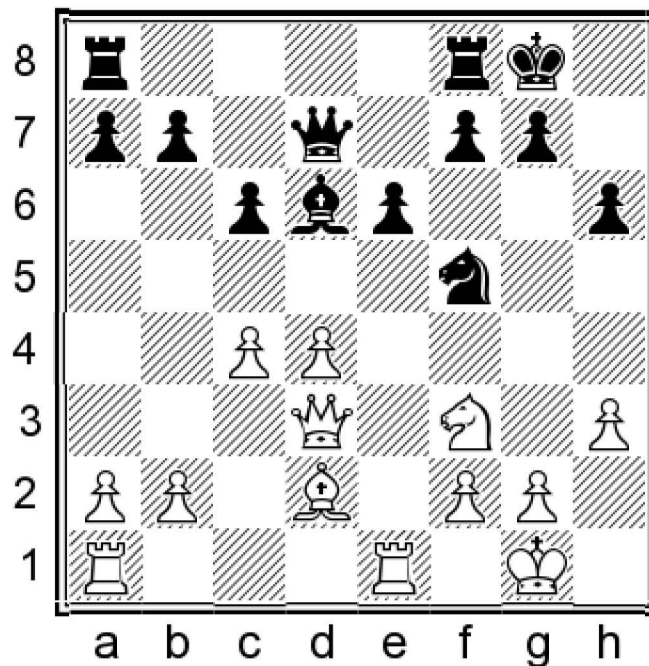


Position after: 13...0-0

14.c4

Simplifying with 14.Ne4 is less logical since it is White who has more space.

14...Nf4 15.Qe3 Ng6 16.Ne5 Ne7 17.Ndf3 Nf5 18.Qd3 Nd7 19.Nxd7 Qxd7 20.Bd2



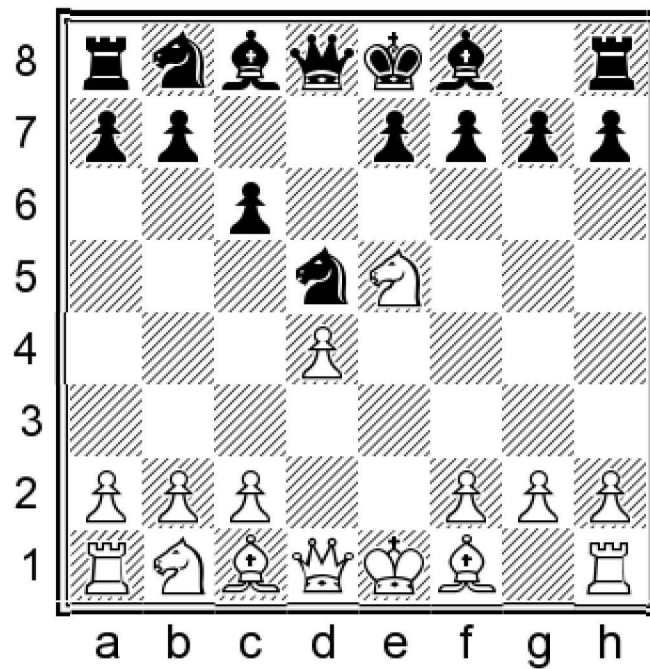
Position after: 20.Bd2

A draw was agreed in Matyukhin, S (2483) – Khromov, S (2496) ICCF email 2004.

White probably would not have risked much continuing for a while with Bc3, Rad1 and possibly Qe4.

As you may have noticed by reading or browsing through this section, the 4...dxe5 5.Nxe5 c6 line has some adepts in correspondence chess, willing (and able) to demonstrate the viability of the variation for Black. Most of the positions after move 10 are slightly better for White, and perhaps not suitable for over-the-board play, but as is often the case in correspondence chess the draw rate is very high.

g) 5...c6 6.Bd3 (Over the Board Practice) 1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.Nf3 dxe5 5.Nxe5 c6



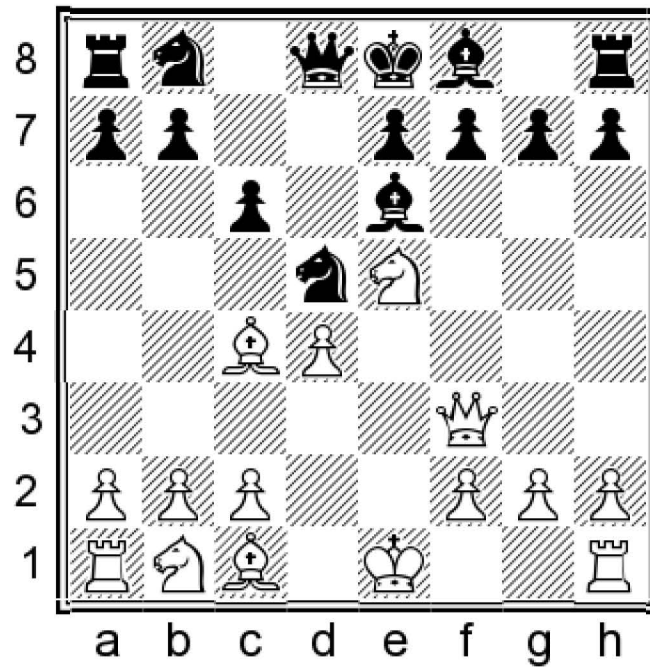
Position after: 5...c6

6.Bd3

A) The mistake 6.c4? occurs in more than 10 percent of all the games where the position after 5...c6 has been reached. 6...Nb4!

B) 6.g3!? is interesting but not critical and I won't say more about it. All the usual black moves make sense here, ...Bf5, ...Nd7 and ...g6.

C) 6.Qf3 Be6 7.Bc4

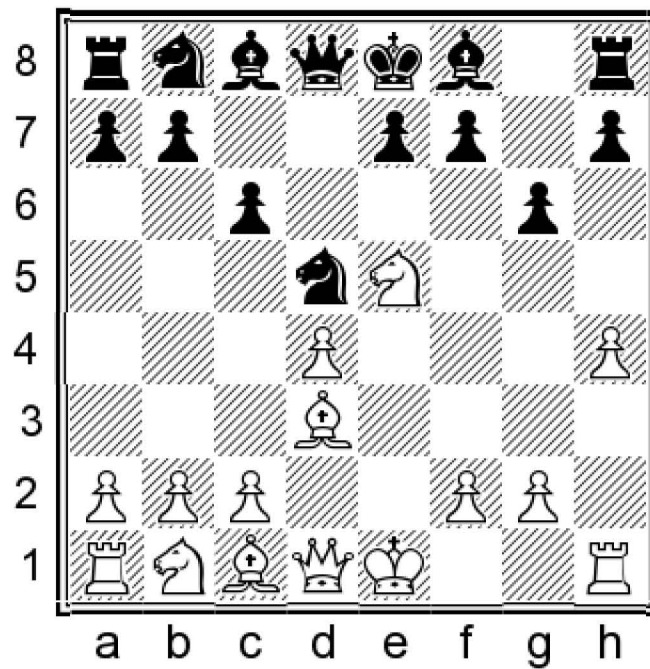


Position after: 7.Bc4

7...g6 [7...Nd7 8.0-0 g6 9.Nxd7 Qxd7 10.Nd2 Bg7 11.c3 Nc7 was close to equal in Balog, I (2558) – Berkes, F (2662) Budapest 2018.] 8.0-0 Bg7 9.c3 0-0 10.Nd2 c5 Black had started his counterplay and his position was satisfactory, Ragger, M (2540) – Miroshnichenko, E (2667) Austria 2009.

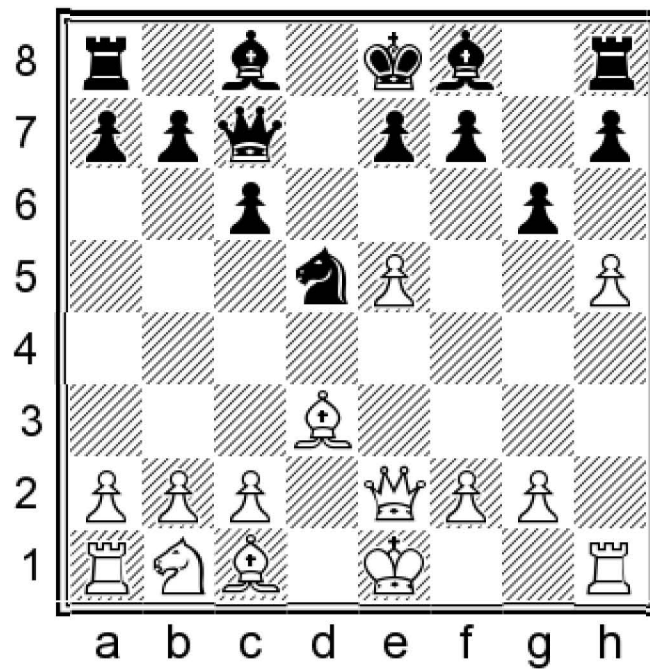
6...Nd7

After 6...g6, 7.0-0 Bg7 8.Re1 would be “normal” and would transpose into some fairly standard stuff. Although I found only one occurrence of 7.h4 I decided to include that move.



Position after: 7.h4

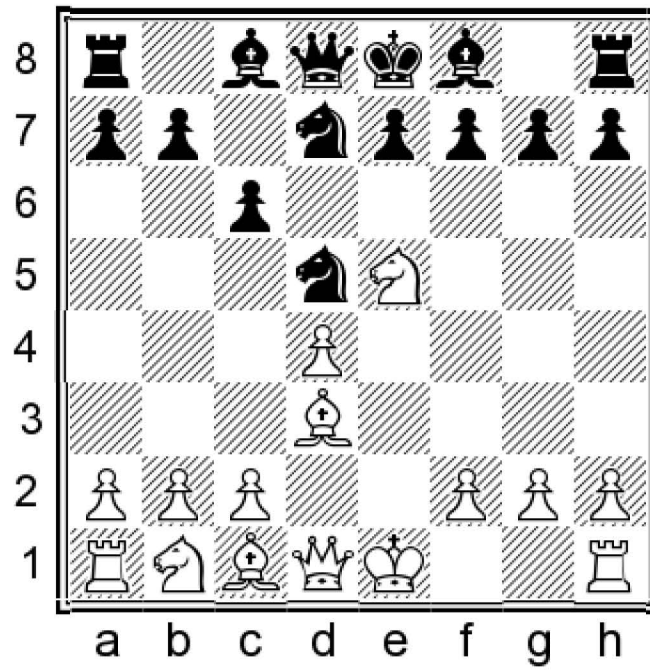
Indeed, for some bold players any ...g7-g6 is an invitation for h2-h4, and the likelihood that you'll face this aggressive option is not so low. 7...Nd7 8.h5 Nxe5 9.dxe5 Qc7 [Here or on the next move 9...Nb4 was interesting.] 10.Qe2



Position after: 10.Qe2

Now rather than 10...gxf5 Iakymov, V (2453) – Miroshnichenko, E (2680) Alushta 2009, when the computer slightly prefers White, it was preferable to opt for 10...Bg7 11.f4 Be6 or make the delayed capture 11...gxf5, a point being that 12.Rxf5 meets 12...Qb6 with ideas of ...Nxf4 Bxf4 ...Qxb2 and also ...Qg1+.

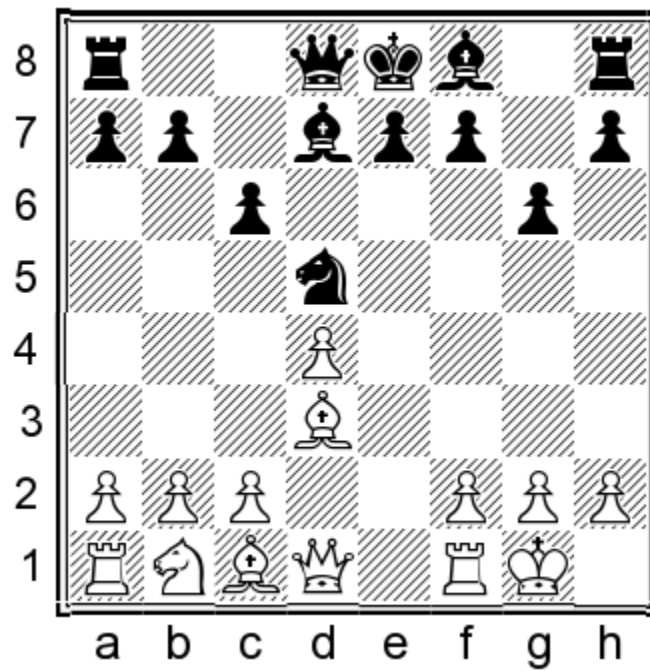
After 6...Nd7 possibly the most promising is 7.0-0.



Position after: 6...Nd7

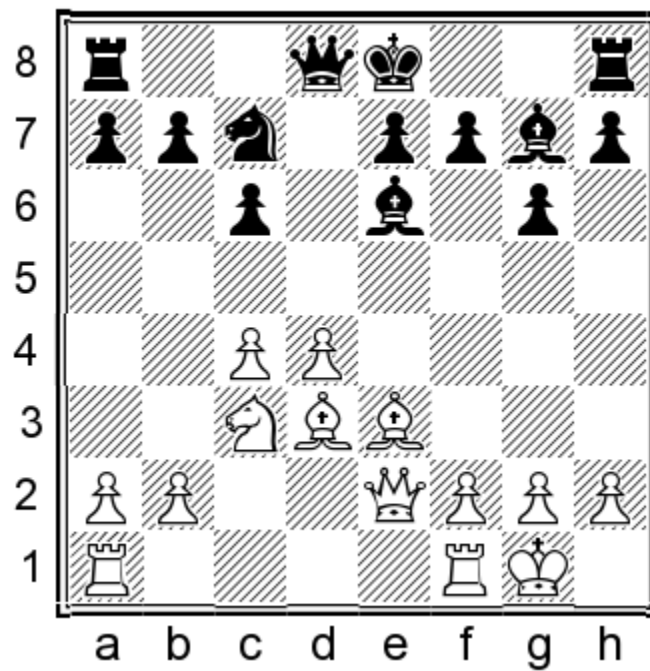
7.0-0

A) 7.Nxd7 Bxd7 8.0-0 g6



Position after: 8...g6

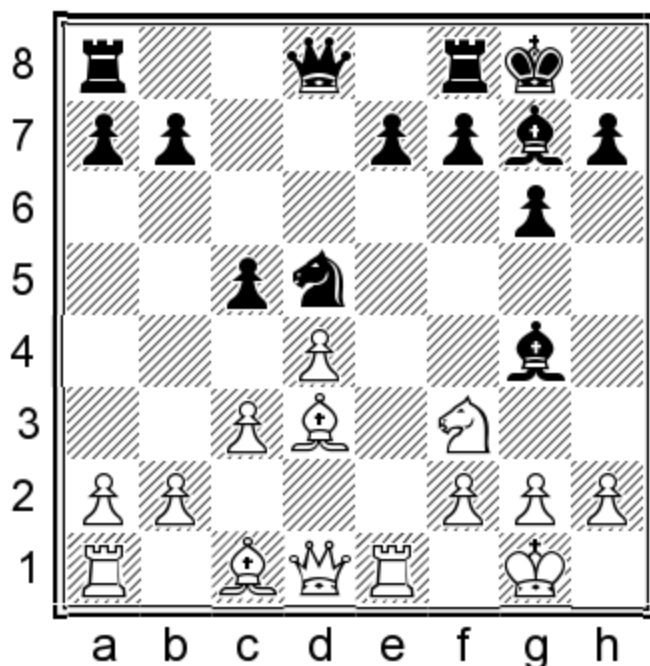
A1) 9.c4 Other continuations are less ambitious/safer, or supposedly so.
 9...Nc7 10.Nc3 Bg7 11.Be3 Be6 12.Qe2



Position after: 12.Qe2

This position arose in Muzychuk, A (2533) – Howell, D (2624) Antwerp 2009. In some ChessBase comments Black's next decision, taking the d4-pawn, was criticized and the "improvement" 12...0-0 13.Rad1 Qd7 offered. My engine is, however, of the opinion that 12...Bxd4 was not to be blamed for Black's later sufferings, only after 13.Rad1 he should have defended with 13...Bxe3 14.Qxe3 Bd7! rather than 13...c5?! 14.Be4 0-0 15.Na4, after which White gained a strong initiative. That being said, White would still have stood a bit better after my proposed improvement.

A2) 9.Nd2 Bg7 10.Nf3 0-0 This position was reached in Topalov, V (2780) – Carlsen, M (2733) Morelia/Linares 2008, when the Bulgarian super-GM chose the careless 11.Re1?! [instead of 11.h3!²] allowing Black to equalize at once thanks to 11...Bg4 12.c3 c5!.

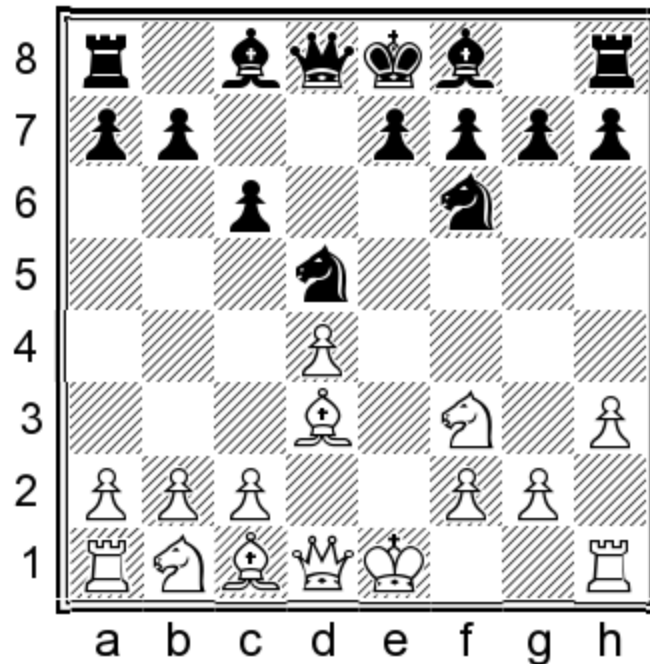


Position after: 12...c5!

Later analysis showed that White should have gone for complications in order to maintain the equilibrium. 13.dxc5! [13.Be2!?!; 13.Be4?! cxd4

14.cxd4 e6³] 13...Nxc3! 14.bxc3 Bxc3 15.Bh6 Bxe1 [15...Bxa1?
16.Qxa1+–] 16.Qxe1 Qxd3 17.Ne5 Qd4 18.c6!=.

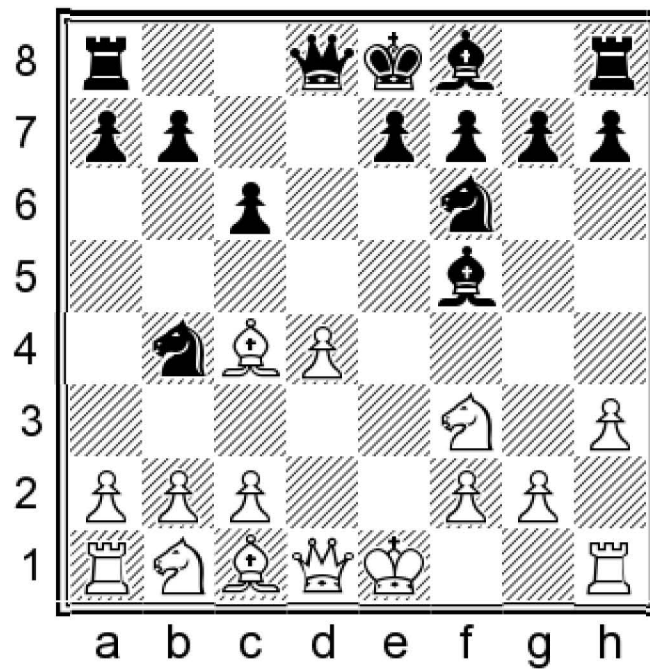
B) 7.Nf3 N7f6 8.h3



Position after: 8.h3

B1) 8...e6 Closing in the light-squared bishop doesn't feel right, although Black didn't do too badly in the following example: 9.0-0 Be7 10.Re1 0-0 11.c4 Nb4 12.Bf1 c5 13.Nc3 cxd4 14.Nxd4 Bd7 15.Bf4 a6² Jovanovic, Z (2520) – Yuffa, D (2594) lichess.org 2020.

B2) 8...Nb4 After this knight sally White could consider leaving his bishop and betting on his lead in development, but 9.0-0 has been a rare choice in practice. Instead both sensible bishop moves should lead to a slight white plus. 9.Bc4 [9.Be2 Bf5 10.Na3 e6 11.0-0 Be7 12.c3 Nbd5 13.Nc4 0-0 14.Nce5 h6 and Black was OK in Navara, D (2719) – Rozentalis, E (2605) Ermioni 2006] 9...Bf5



Position after: 9...Bf5

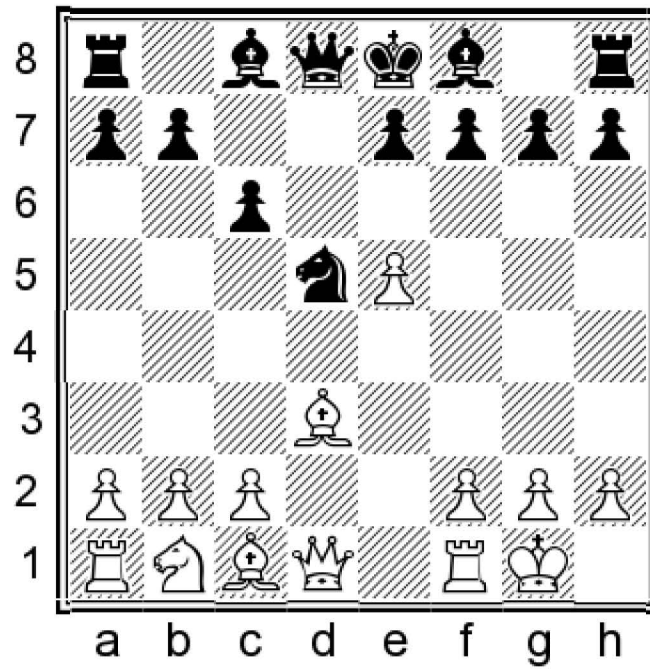
B2.1) 10.Na3 e6 11.c3 Nbd5 12.Nc2 Be7 13.Ne3 Bg6 [13...Nxe3!? 14.Bxe3 0-0=] 14.Ne5 with equality in Adams, M (2729) – Carlsen, M (2714) Moscow (blitz) 2007.

B2.2) 10.Bb3 e6 [10...a5 11.a3 a4? would be nice if White didn't have 12.Bxf7+!±.] 11.a3 Nbd5 12.c4 Nb6 13.0-0²

7...Nxe5

7...g6!? was played in the game Korneev, O – Miroshnichenko, E Khanty-Mansiysk 2005.

8.dxe5



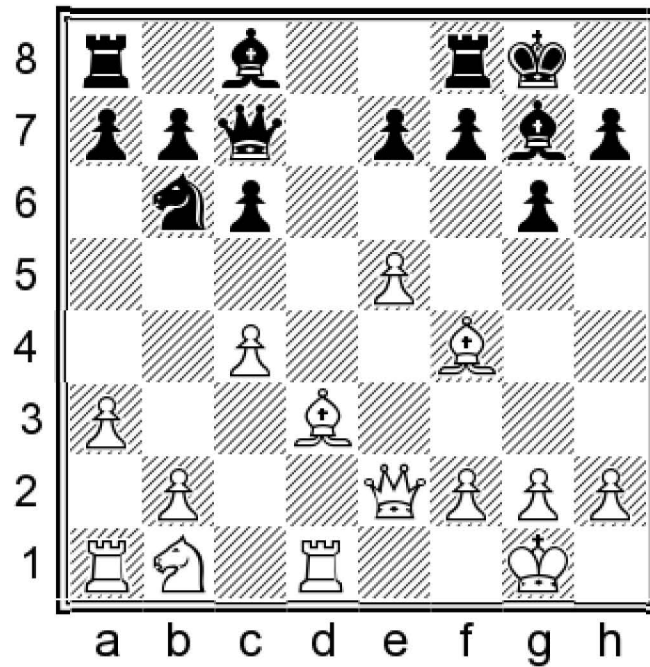
Position after: 8.dxe5

8...g6

8...Nb4?! 9.Be4 Qxd1 10.Rxd1 proved a bit better for White in Sutovsky, E (2639) – Carlsen, M (2385) Rethymnon 2003.

9.c3

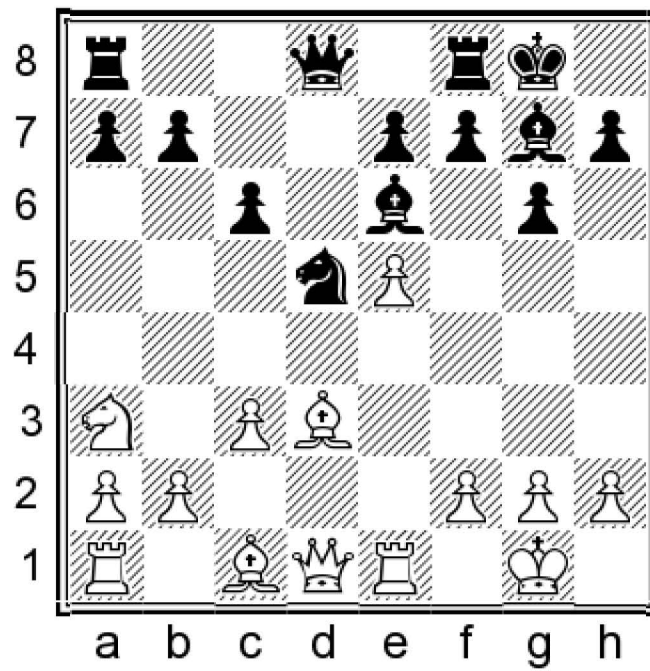
9.Qe2 Bg7 10.a3 0-0 11.Rd1 Qc7 12.c4 Nb6 13.Bf4



Position after: 13.Bf4

This happened in the blitz game Jovanovic, Z (2534) – Luch, M (2433) Tallinn 2016, where instead of 13...Be6 I prefer 13...Nd7 forcing the rook to e1 (14.Re1) before bouncing back with 14...Nc5.

9...Bg7 10.Re1 0-0 11.Na3 Be6 ∞

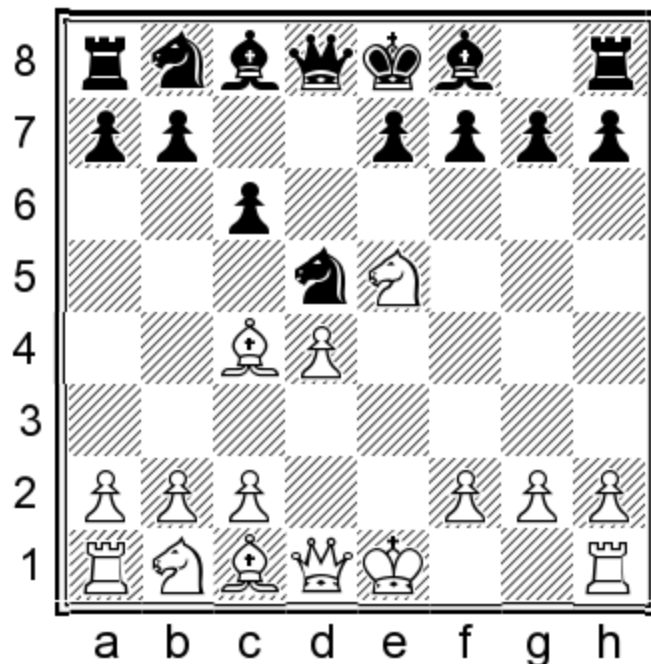


Position after: 11...Be6

Sutovsky, E – Mamedyarov, S Gothenburg 2005.

The position is unclear.

h) 5...c6 6.Bc4 (Over the Board Practice) 1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.Nf3 dxe5 5.Nxe5 c6 6.Bc4

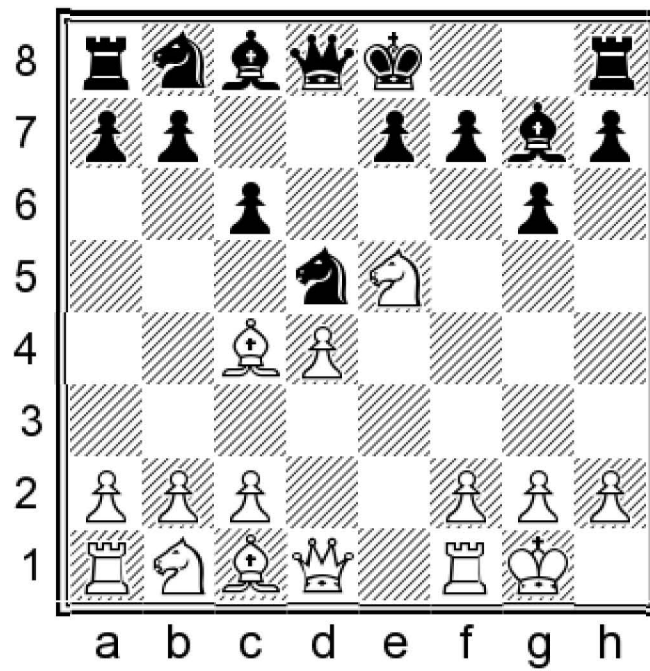


Position after: 6.Bc4

6...Nd7

A) 6...Be6 7.0-0 Nd7 8.Nf3 Nc7 This was played in Golubev, M (2532) – Kasimdzhanov, R (2652) playchess.com 2004 [8...Ne3!? was the continuation of the correspondence game McKenzie, C – Fitzpatrick, S, see relevant section] 9.Bd3² [White could also have opened up the position by means of 9.Bxe6 Nxe6 10.d5 cxd5 11.Qxd5f]

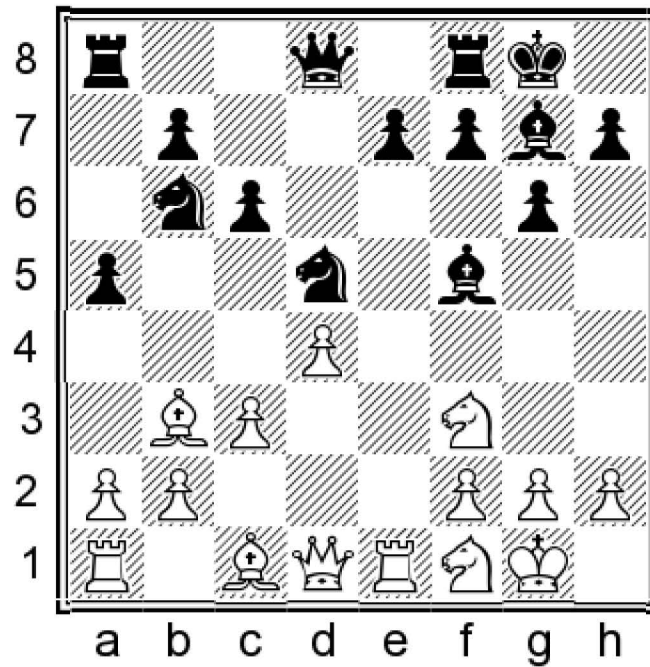
B) 6...g6 7.0-0 Bg7



Position after: 7...Bg7

B1) 8.c3 0-0

B1.1) 9.Nd2 Be6 10.Bb3 Nd7 11.Nef3 a5 [11...Nc7!?] 12.Re1 Bf5
13.Nf1 N7b6

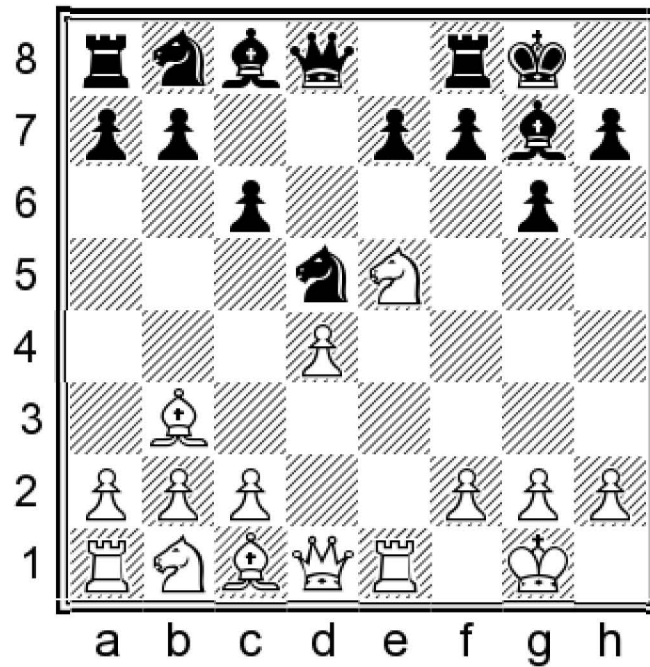


Position after: 13...N7b6

Jackova, J (2396) – Miroshnichenko, E (2696) Zurich 2009. Here I prefer 14.a4² over the game continuation 14.a3 a4 and so on, but White seems a bit better in both cases.

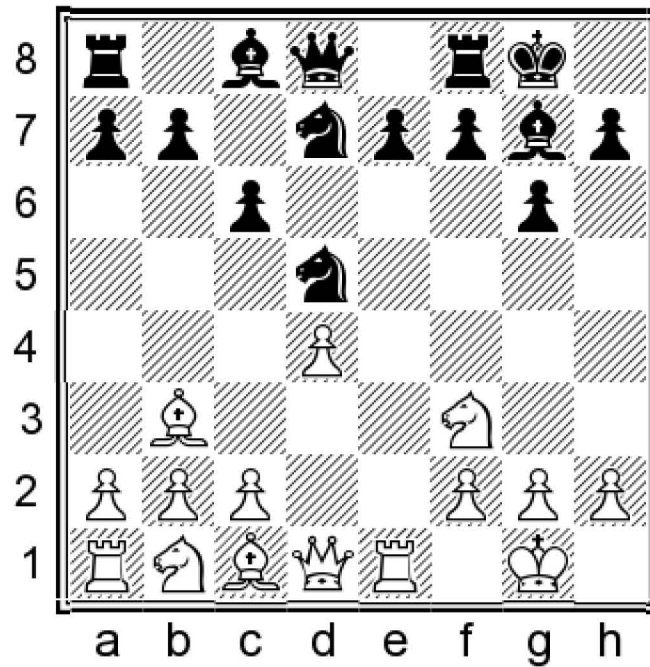
B1.2) 9.Re1 Be6 10.Nd2 Nd7 11.Nxd7 [11.Nef3!] 11...Qxd7 12.Ne4 Bf5 13.Nc5 Qc7 Vachier Lagrave, M (2705) – Fier, A (2563) Villandry (rapid) 2012. Black had a better version of what he usually gets.

B2) 8.Bb3 0-0 9.Re1



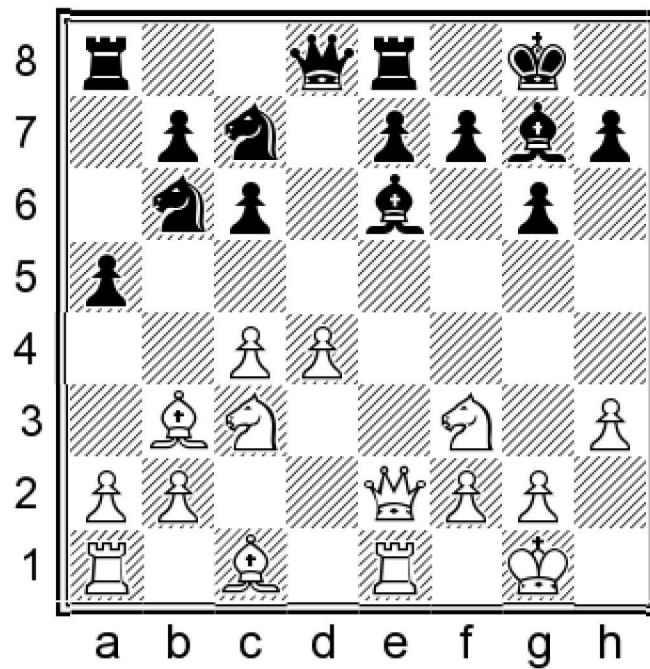
Position after: 9.Re1

9...Nd7 [9...Be6 10.c3 Nd7 11.Nf3 Bg4 12.Nbd2 e6 13.h3 Bxf3 14.Nxf3 Topalov, V (2739) – Ivanchuk, V (2717) Monte Carlo (rapid) 2002. A fairly standard position for the ...c6/...g6 line; the solidity of the black position doesn't quite compensate for the enemy bishops.] 10.Nf3



Position after: 10.Nf3

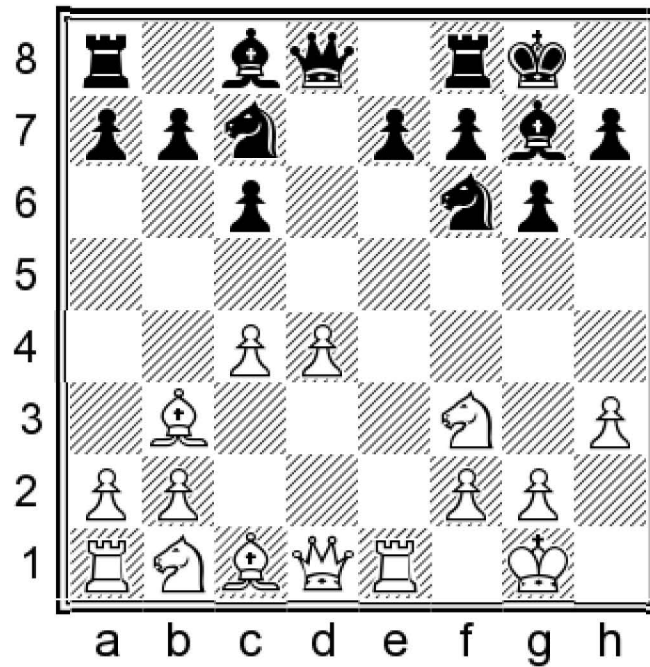
B2.1) After 10...Re8 the critical test seems to be 11.c4! Nc7 12.Nc3 as in Westerinen, H – Larsen, B Helsinki 1969. White should be able to maintain a pleasant advantage from here on, as he did for the next half-dozen moves in that game. 12...Nb6 13.h3 Be6 14.Qe2 a5.



Position after: 14...a5

15.a3 [15.a4 and 15.Be3, intending 15...a4 16.d5, were good too]
 15...Nb5!? At this stage rather than the messy 16.Nxb5 cxb5 17.d5,
 White could have kept things under control with 16.Be3!.

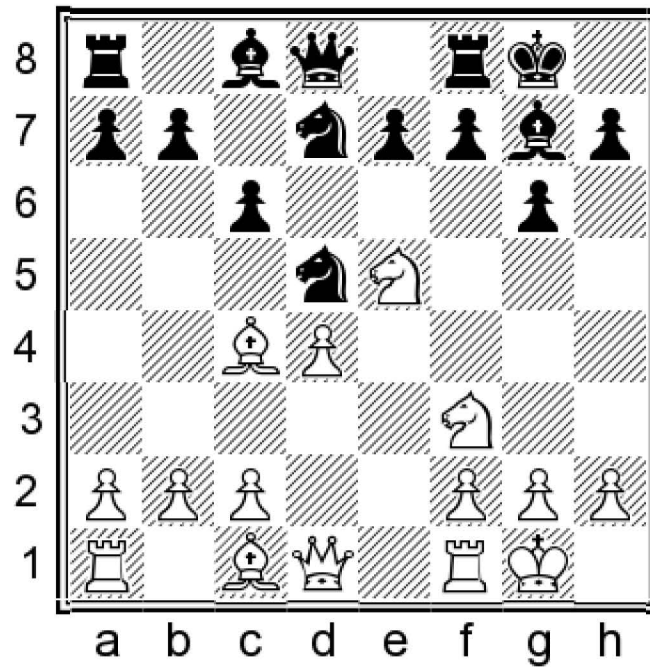
B2.2) 10...N7f6 11.c4 Nc7 12.h3!



Position after: 12.h3!

12...c5 [perhaps Black should continue dancing with his horse, but 12...Ne6 13.Nc3 Qc7 14.Be3² is also advantageous for White, with little chance of going wrong] 13.Nc3 cxd4 14.Nxd4 Ne6 15.Be3 White had a neat plus, Kasparov, G (2795) – Adams, M (2665) Linares 1997.

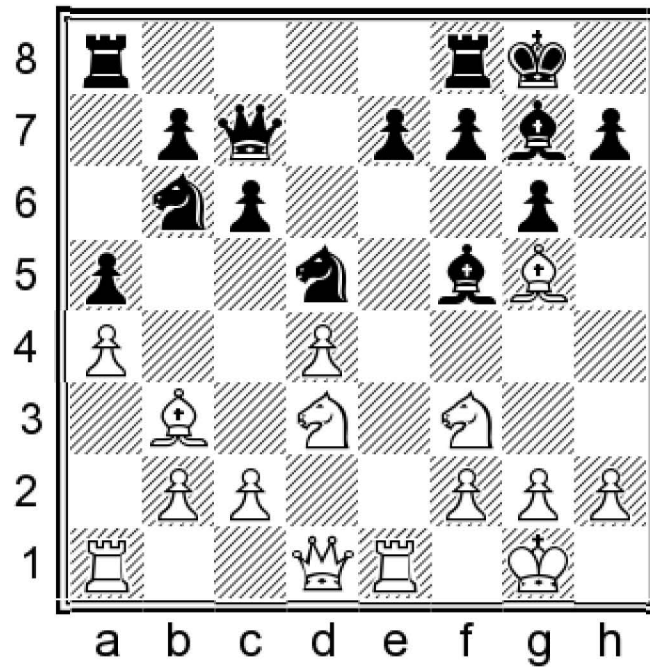
B3) 8.Nd2 0-0 9.Ndf3 Nd7



Position after: 9...Nd7

10.Nd3! [10.h3?! This casual move enables Black to quickly get active.
 10...Nxe5 11.Nxe5 Be6 12.Bb3 Nc7 13.Re1 Bxb3 14.axb3 c5 This
 proved fine for Black in Movsesian, S (2747) – Svidler, P (2726) Odessa
 (rapid) 2009. Another interesting move was 14...Qd5!?.]

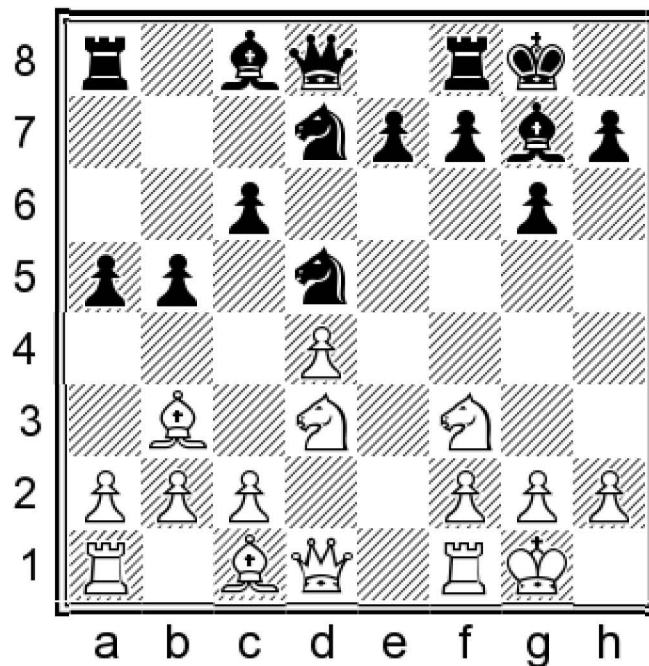
B3.1) 10...N7b6 11.Bb3 a5 12.a4 Bf5 13.Re1 Qc7 14.Bg5!



Position after: 14.Bg5!

We are following Bologan, V – Miroshnichenko, E Kragujevac 2009. With his last move White threatened to expel the powerful knight now that the e7-pawn is under attack. Black would still have the option of ...Nd5-f6, but then Bf4 followed by Nc5 could prove nasty. If he moves his a8-rook Black needs to find a remedy to Qd2, so that all in all his sensible possibilities are reduced. He chose 14...Bxd3 15.Qxd3 e6 but White held a stable edge after 16.c3. I offer 14...Rfe8 15.h3 Nd7!?, when the engine sees reasonable compensation for the pawn following 16.Bxd5 cxd5 17.Bxe7 Rac8 18.c3 Nb6 19.Bg5 Nc4.

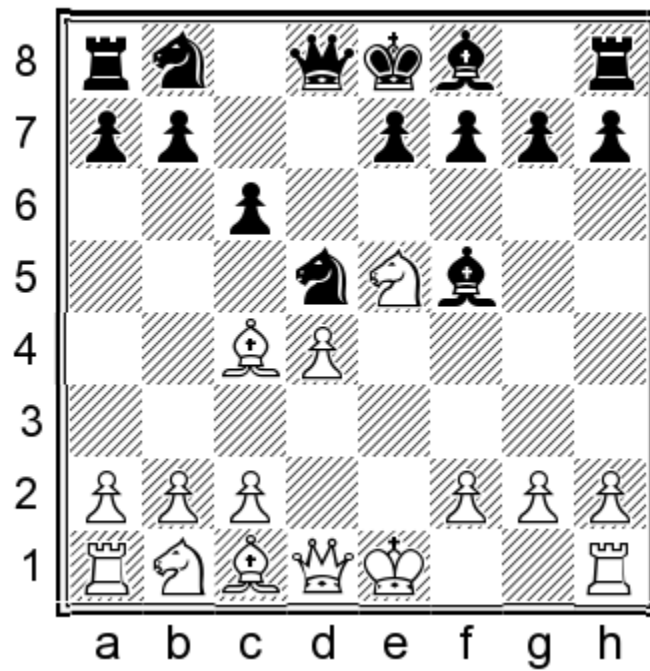
B3.2) 10...b5 could be more to the point. 11.Bb3 [For some reasons the machine suggests that the novelty 11.Bxd5!? cxd5 could be a tiny bit better for White after either 12.a4 or 12.Qe2, but that is hard to believe.] 11...a5



Position after: 11...a5

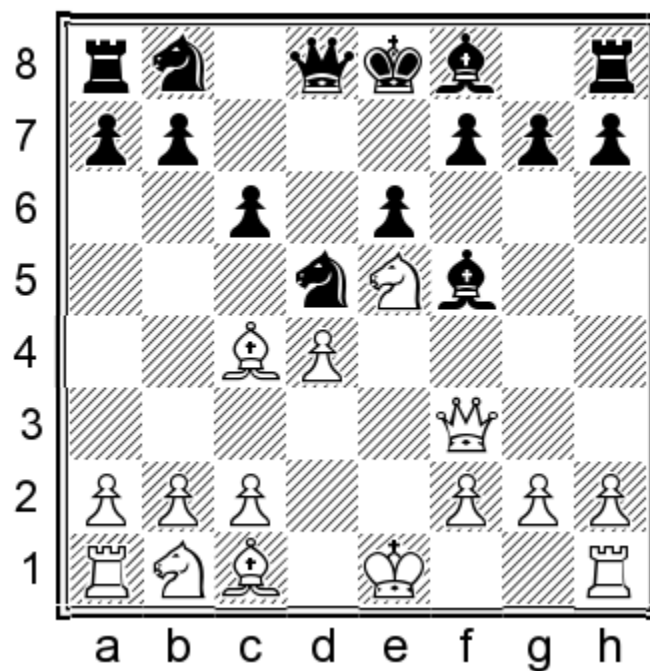
12.a4 [Even though Black would react the same way after 12.a3?! N7b6 as in Godena, M (2519) – Bacrot, E (2691) Liverpool 2008, pushing the a-pawn two squares forward creates some tension and at least asks Black some questions.] 12...N7b6 13.Nfe5 [13.Nc5 deserves consideration too.] 13...Qc7 [13...bxa4!?] 14.Bd2 bxa4 15.Bxa4 Ba6 Both sides had their chances in Palkovi, J (2480) – Horvath, J (2505) Budapest 1996.

C) 6...Bf5!? This move is a curiosity: I could find only one irrelevant instance of it in the correspondence 2020 database! Compared with 5...Bf5?! the inclusion of Bc4/c6 undoubtedly favors Black, and since direct attempts to refute 6...Bf5 fail I am clueless about the reason why nobody tries it in correspondence chess.



Position after: 6...Bf5!?

C1) 7.g4 Be6 can't really bother Black, and he seems to have enough resources to meet 7.Qf3. 7...e6

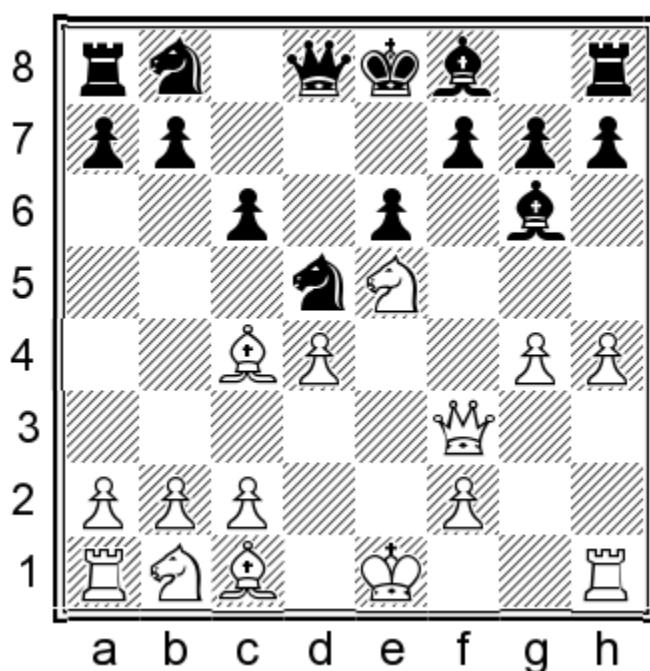


Position after: 7...e6

C1.1) 8.Bd3 Qf6 9.Bxf5 Qxf5 10.Qxf5 exf5 Tsaruk, M (2302) – Roque, G (2128) chess.com 2020. This may be a tad better for White but certainly not more.

C1.2) 8.Nxf7 This will eventually transpose into a playable variation of the 5...Bf5?! line. 8...Kxf7 9.g4 Qf6 10.gxf5 Qxf5 11.Qxf5+ exf5∞

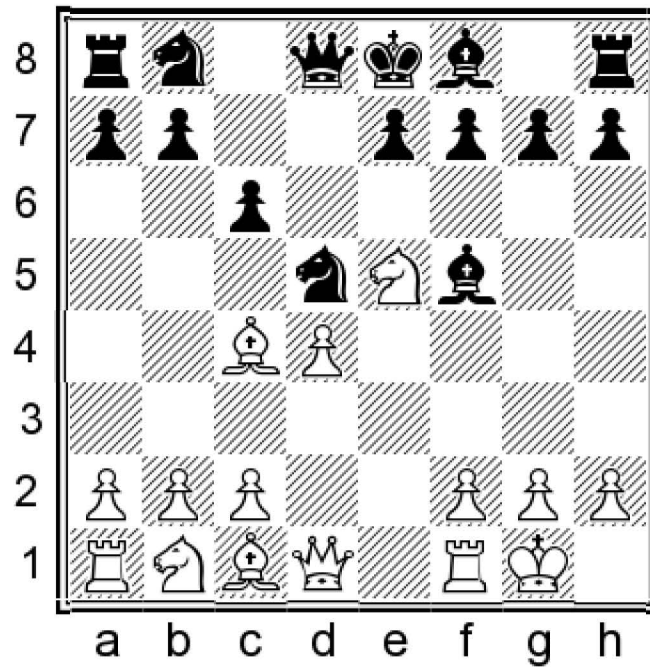
C1.3) 8.g4 Bg6 9.h4?



Position after: 9.h4?

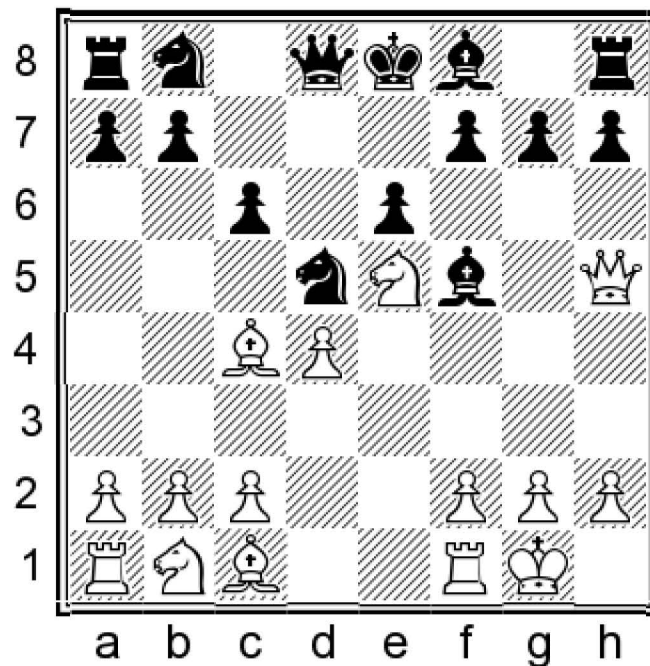
In the blitz game Bologan, V (2615) – Yuffa, D (2527) Moscow 2017 the Moldovan GM essayed this threatening thrust. It may well have seemed justified, especially at a fast time control, but the white kingside expansion reveals itself to be more weakening than anything else. 9...Nd7 Black stood better after the game continuation, 10.Nxg6 hxg6, but persisting with 10.h5?! would have been even worse: 10...Nxe5 11.dxe5 Bxc2μ.

C2) 7.0-0



Position after: 7.0-0

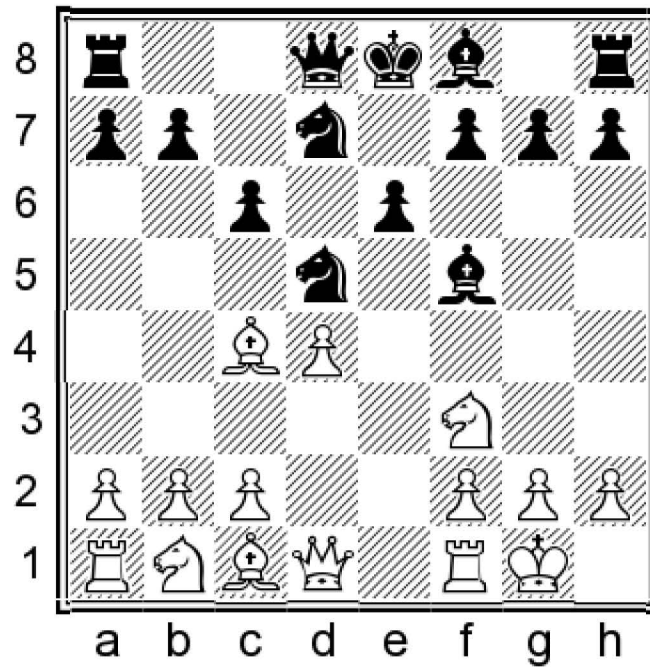
C2.1) 7...e6?! 8.Qh5! [Other white eighth moves are rather harmless, for instance: 8.Re1 Be7 9.Bd3 Bxd3 10.Qxd3 Nd7 11.Nxd7 Qxd7= Baskin, R (2390) – Gordievsky, D (2559) lichess.org 2020; while 8.Bb3 Nd7 9.c4 N5f6 10.Nf3 Bd6 was fully OK for Black in Kosteniuk, A (2471) – Gunina, V (2431) chess.com 2020.] After 8.Qh5 (mentioned by C&K but without any further comment) Black has no way to develop comfortably.



Position after: 8.Qh5!

8...Bg6? 9.Nxg6 is obviously very bad and 8...Qe7 blocks the way for the dark-squared bishop. Since 8...Qc7 leads to worries after 9.Bxd5! cxd5 10.Nc3, intending Nxd5, there remains 8...g6 9.Qe2 h5 as the lesser evil, but who would be willing to play this as Black?

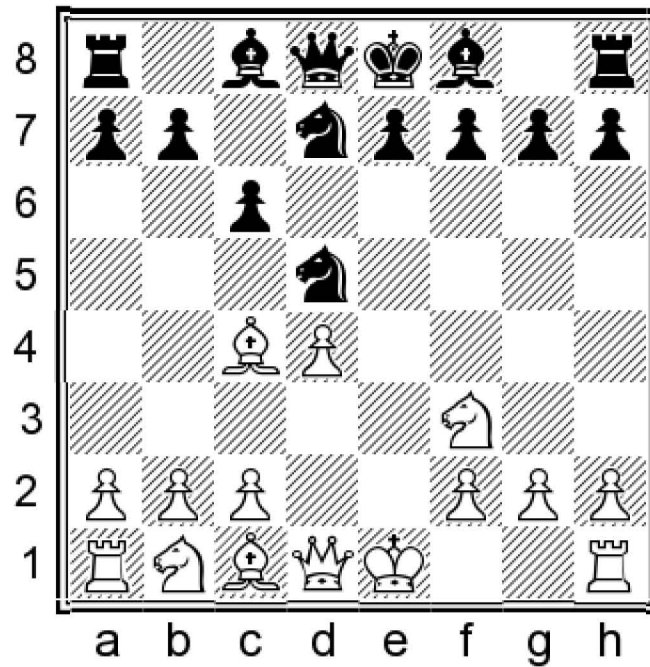
C2.2) 7...Nd7 Black needs to start with this move because the untested 7...e6 8.Qh5! is annoying, as the previous lines demonstrate. 8.Nf3 Other moves are of course playable. 8...e6 And now two recent blitz games diverge.



Position after: 8...e6

9.h3 [9.Re1 Bd6 10.Nc3 Nxc3 11.bxc3 0-0= Bailet, P (2500) – Cornette, D (2400) Europe-Echecs 2020] 9...Be7 10.Bd3 0-0!? [the less committal 10...Bxd3 was also around equal] 11.Bxf5 exf5 12.c4 N5f6 13.Nc3 Ne4 14.Re1 Ndf6 Baskin, R (2390) – Tristan, L (2535) chess.com 2020.

7.Nf3!



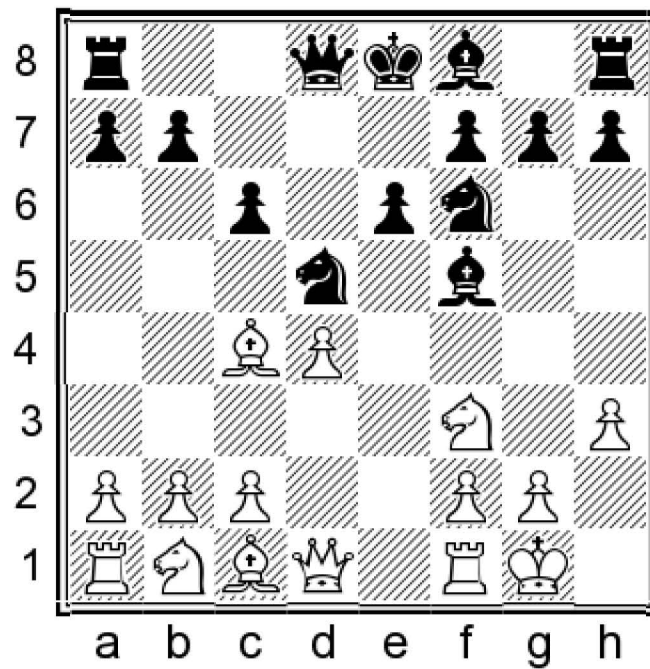
Position after: 7.Nf3!

7.Nxd7 is less ambitious/good.

7...N7b6

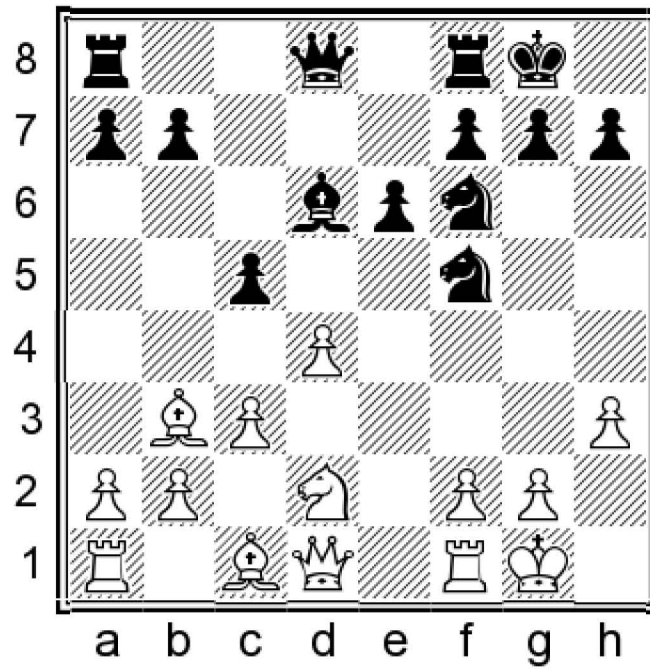
A) 7...g6 8.0-0 Bg7 9.Re1 0-0 10.c3 Re8 11.Bg5 Nf8 12.Nbd2 Be6 13.Bh4 Qb6 14.Bb3² Bologan, V (2681) – Mamedyarov, S (2764) Beijing 2012.

B) 7...N7f6 8.h3 Bf5 9.0-0 e6



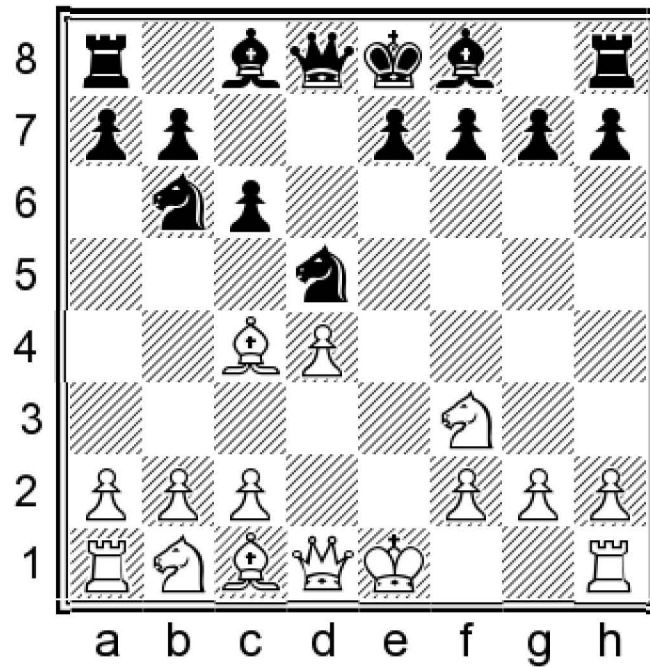
Position after: 9...e6

10.Bb3 White's most frequent and most promising choice at this stage in my opinion, preparing c2-c4. Interestingly, correspondence practice focused more on 10.Re1 and 10.Bd3, see the relevant section for examples of the former. [Here you have an illustration of how another alternative can be easily defused: 10.Bg5 Be7 11.Nbd2 h6 12.Bxf6 Nxf6 13.c3 0-0 14.Bb3 c5 15.Bc2 Bxc2 16.Qxc2 Rc8= Shirov, A (2739) – Carlsen, M (2714) Moscow (rapid) 2007.] 10...Bd6 11.Nbd2 0-0 12.Nh4 Ne7 13.Nxf5 Nxf5 14.c3 c5



Position after: 14...c5

Smirin, I (2641) – Nakamura, H (2701) Philadelphia 2009. The Israeli GM convinced himself that Black was active enough to counterbalance White's pair of bishops, and agreed a draw here.



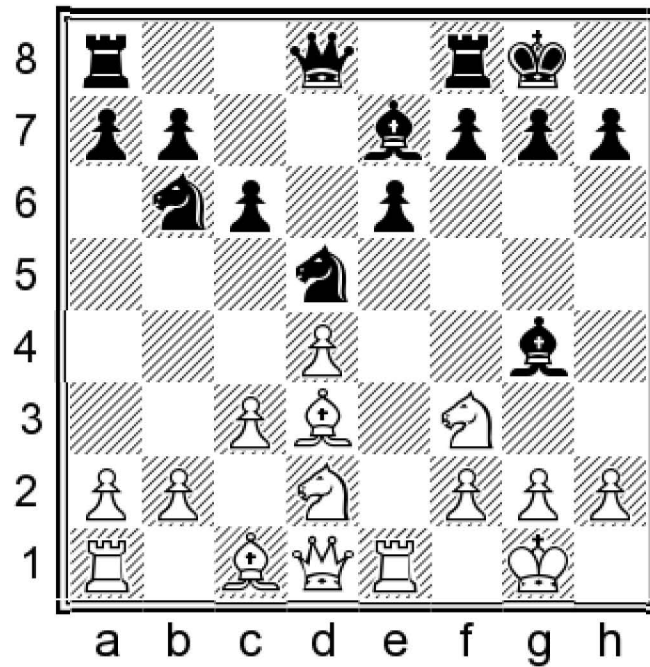
Position after: 7...N7b6

The white bishop has three options.

8.Be2!?

A) On 8.Bb3 the advance 8...a5 is a bit embarrassing because if White opts for the radical 9.a4 a later c2-c4 will see the enemy knight happily jump to b4. Instead, the game Kasimdzhanov, R (2670) – Mamedyarov, S (2674) Baku 2005 continued this way: 9.c3 Bg4 10.h3 Bh5 11.0-0 e6 12.Re1 Be7 and Black had nothing to complain about.

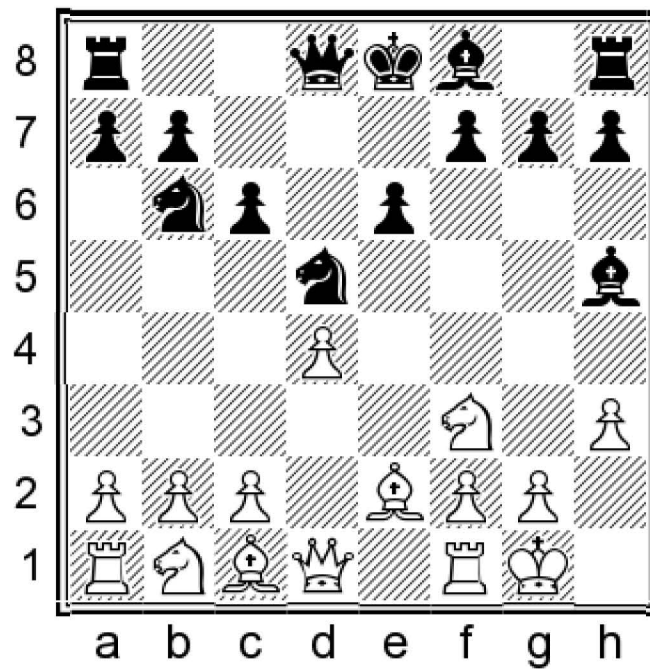
B) 8.Bd3 Bg4 9.0-0 e6 10.c3 Be7 11.Nbd2 0-0 12.Re1



Position after: 12.Re1

12...c5 [Black probably had better chances to equalize with either 12...Bh5 or 12...Nf4 13.Bf1 Qc7] 13.dxc5 Bxc5 This happened in Svidler, P (2723) – Grunberg, M (2401) chess.com 2020, where now 14.Qc2!² improves on the game continuation.

8...Bg4 9.0-0 e6 10.h3 Bh5



Position after: 10...Bh5

Black has resolved the development of the light-squared bishop, but not all his problems.

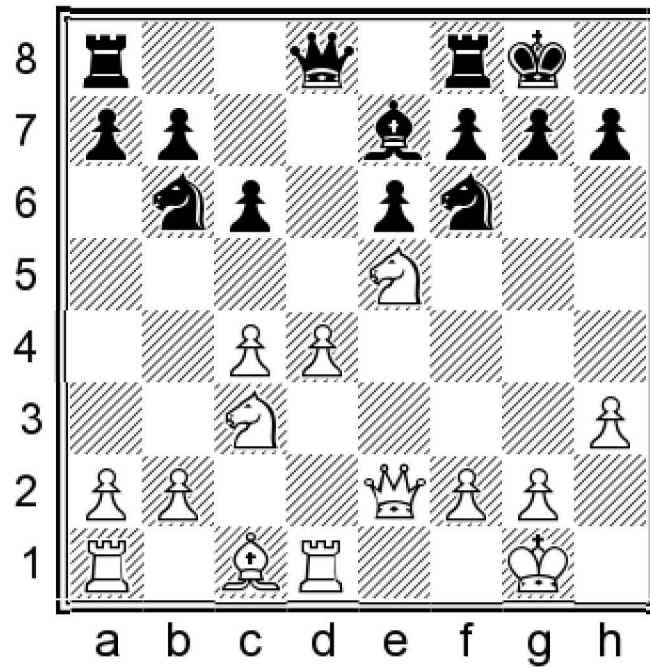
11.Ne5

11.Nbd2?! Nf4f

11...Bxe2 12.Qxe2 Be7

12...Nf6 13.Rd1 doesn't change much.

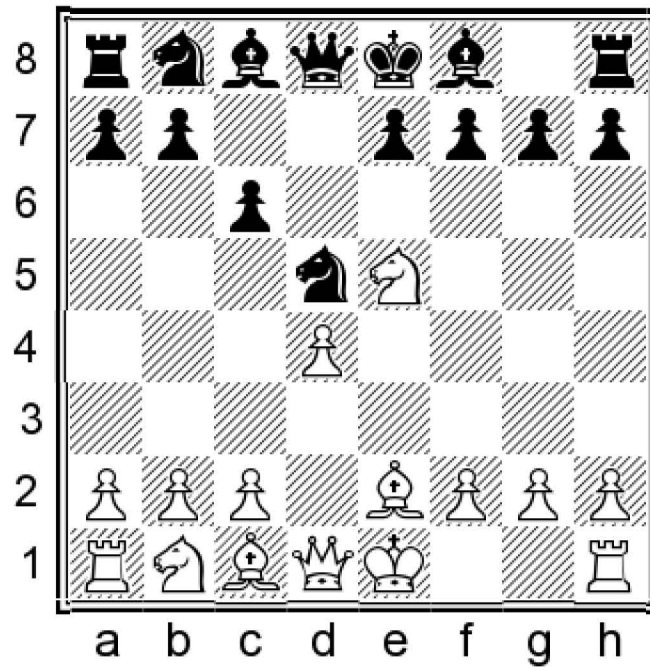
13.c4 Nf6 14.Rd1 0-0 15.Nc3²



Position after: 15.Nc3²

White was a bit better in the game Jakovenko, D – Bu, X Nizhnij Novgorod 2007.

i) 5...c6 6.Be2 Nd7 (Over the Board Practice) 1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.Nf3 dxe5 5.Nxe5 c6 6.Be2



Position after: 6.Be2

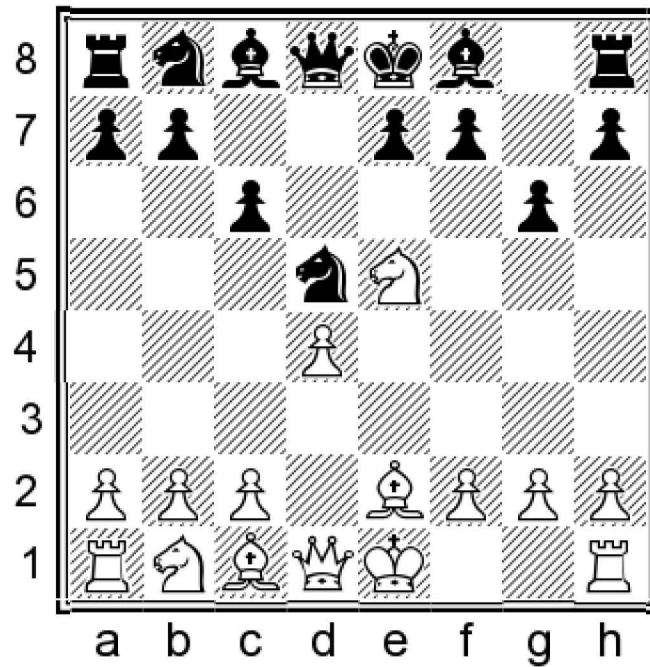
By far the most popular choice here, keeping the pawn thrust c2-c4 in reserve.

6...Nd7

This knight move appears in more than one game out of four when the Elo average of the belligerents is 2300+.

In this line, as well as after 6...g6, White's prospects of getting an opening edge are higher in my opinion.

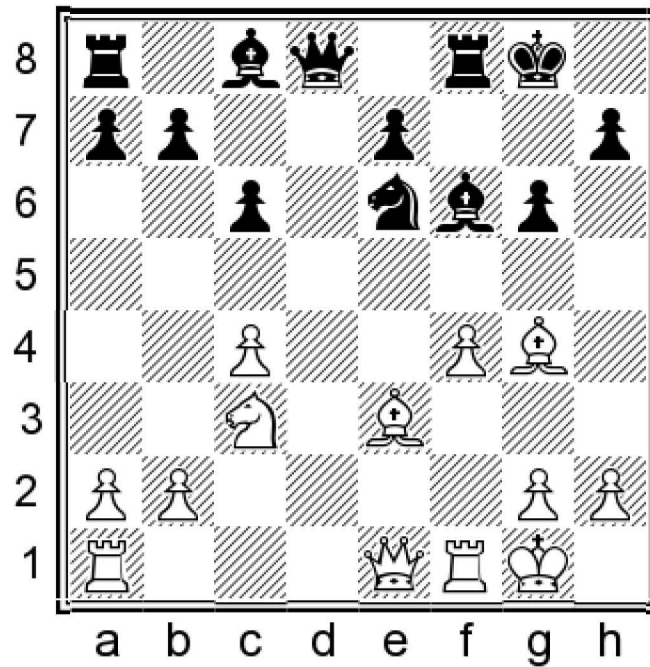
6...g6



Position after: 6...g6

A) 7.Nd2 Nf4?! This artificial move brought Black problems in the rapid game Grischuk, A (2764) – Nakamura, H (2760) Beijing 2012: 8.Bc4! Be6 9.Bxe6 Nxe6 10.Qf3! f6 11.Qb3±. Rather than removing his centralized knight, Black should of course have preferred the logical 7...Bg7.

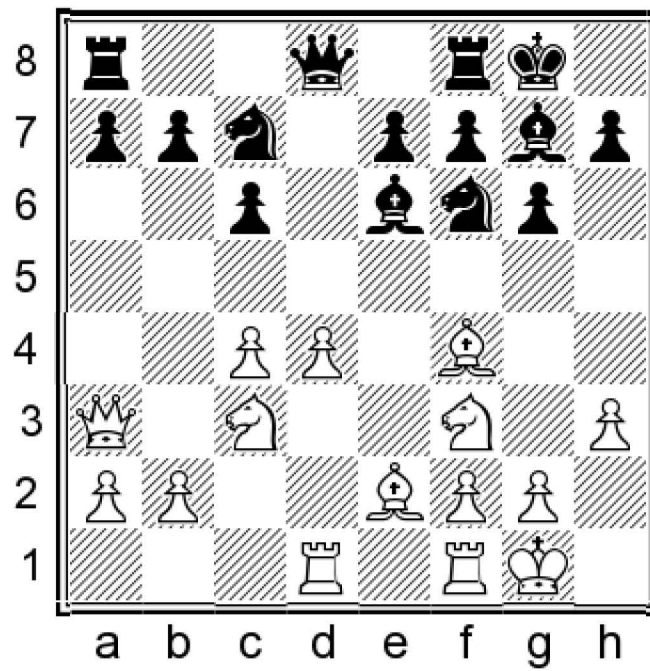
B) 7.0-0 Bg7 8.c4 Nc7 9.Be3 0-0 10.f4 Nd7 11.Nc3 Ne6 12.Bg4 Nxe5 13.dxe5 f6 14.exf6 Bxf6 15.Qe1



Position after: 15.Qe1

15...Ng7 was unclear in the Ukrainian duel Vovk, Y (2546) – Miroshnichenko, E (2667) Cappelle-la-Grande 2009. Rather than Black's last move C&K relay the computer's suggestion 15...Qd3!?, to which I'd add that 15...Nd4 is also adequate to keep the balance.

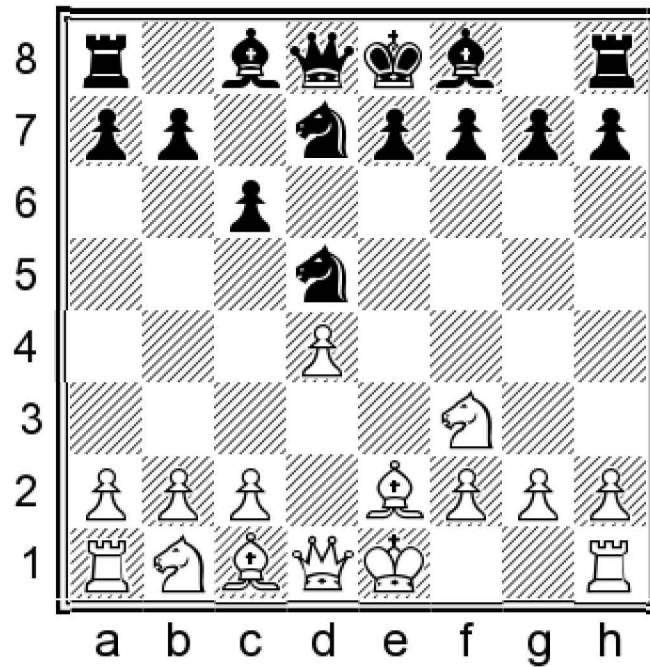
C) 7.c4 Nc7 8.Nc3 Bg7 9.0-0 0-0 10.Be3 Nd7 11.Nf3 Nf6 12.h3 Bf5 13.Qb3 Rb8 14.Bf4 Be6 15.Qa3 Ra8 16.Rad1



Position after: 16.Rad1

White was in the driver's seat, Kobalia, M (2651) – Vitiugov, N (2734)
Khanty Mansiysk (blitz) 2013.

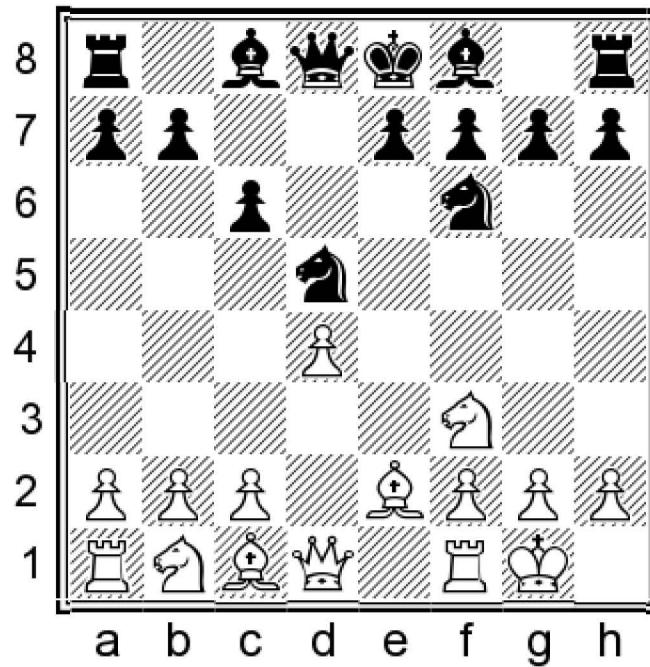
7.Nf3!



Position after: 7.Nf3!

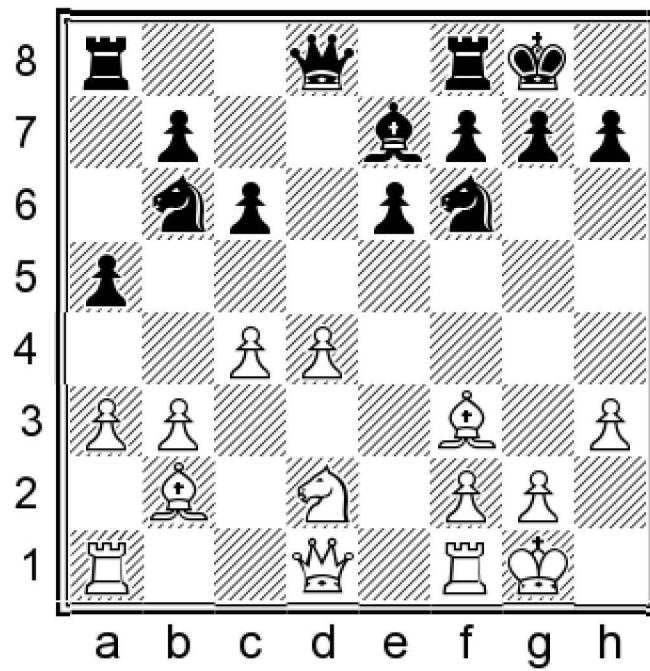
7...g6

A) 7...N7f6 8.0-0 [8.c4 Nb6 9.h3 Bf5 10.Nc3 e6 11.Be3 Be7 12.0-0 0-0 13.Nh4 Bg6 14.Nxg6 hxg6 Godena, M (2511) – Akopian, V (2705) Legnica 2013 was analogous to Anand – Carlsen from 8.0-0 Bf5 and thus equally ² but quite solid for Black.]



Position after: 8.0-0

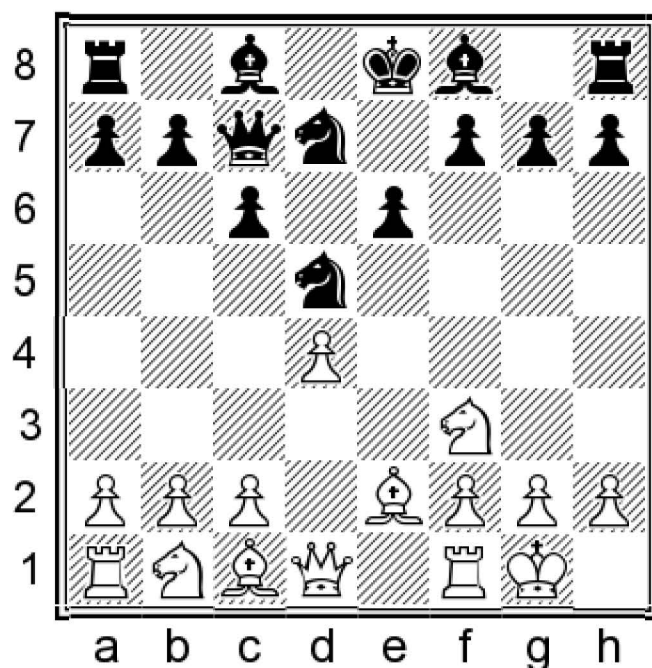
8...Bg4 [8...Bf5 9.Nh4 Bg6 10.c4 Nb6 11.Nc3 e6 12.g3 Be7 13.Be3 Qc7
 14.Nxg6 hxg6 15.Qb3 Rd8 16.Rfd1 0-0 17.Rac1² Anand, V (2799) –
 Carlsen, M (2733) Nice (rapid blindfold) 2008] 9.h3 Bxf3 10.Bxf3 e6
 11.c4 Nb6 12.b3 Be7 13.Bb2 0-0 14.Nd2 a5 15.a3²



Position after: 15.a3²

His two bishops provided White with a lasting edge in Karjakin, S (2732)
– Carlsen, M (2733) Nice (rapid) 2008.

B) 7...Qc7 8.0-0 e6



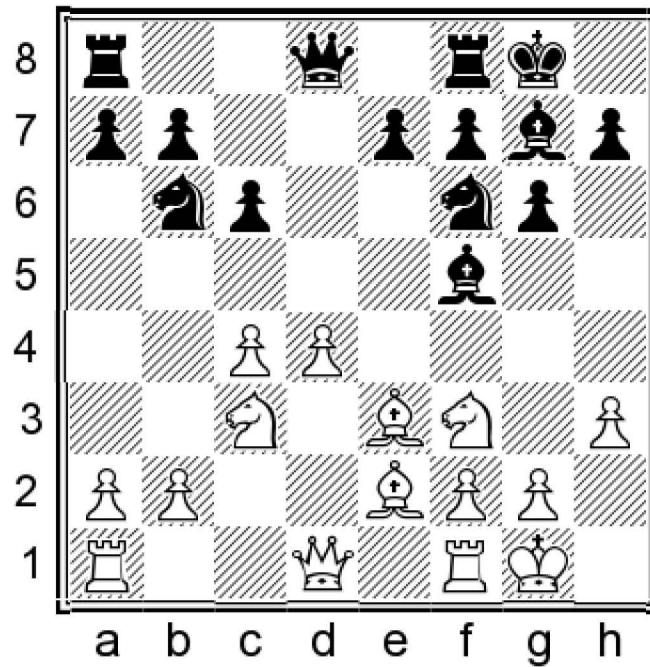
Position after: 8...e6

B1) 9.Re1! The rook move enables White to retreat Bf1 in response to the jump ...Nf4. 9...Be7 10.c4 N5f6 11.Nc3 0-0 12.Bd3 Najer, E (2641) – Mamedyarov, S (2674) Khanty-Mansiysk 2005. White is preventing the freeing advances ...c6-c5 and ...e6-e5, and he enjoys a risk-free edge owing to his spatial predominance.

B2) Less accurate is 9.c4 because after 9...Nf4 Black will swap the e2-bishop. 10.Nc3 Be7 11.Re1 Nxe2+ 12.Qxe2 0-0 13.Bg5 Bxg5 14.Nxg5 h6 15.Nf3 b6 Anand, V (2799) – Mamedyarov, S (2760) Nice (rapid) 2008. Black may still be worse but I would rather defend this position than the one arising after 12.Bd3 in the 9.Re1 line.

8.c4

White can delay this push by one move, which changes nothing. Here's an example where Black then withdrew his knight to b6 but also failed to fully equalize. 8.0-0 Bg7 9.c4 N5b6 10.Nc3 0-0 11.Be3 Nf6 12.h3 Bf5

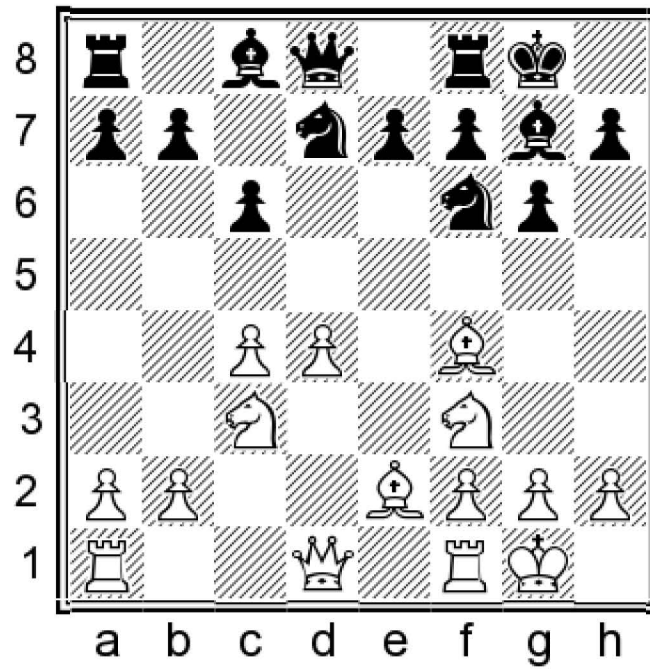


Position after: 12...Bf5

We are following Potapov, P (2460) – Andreikin, D (2713) Khanty-Mansiysk 2013, where White played 13.b4?! Ne4!² [but he could have secured a larger plus with 13.a4! a5 14.Qb3].

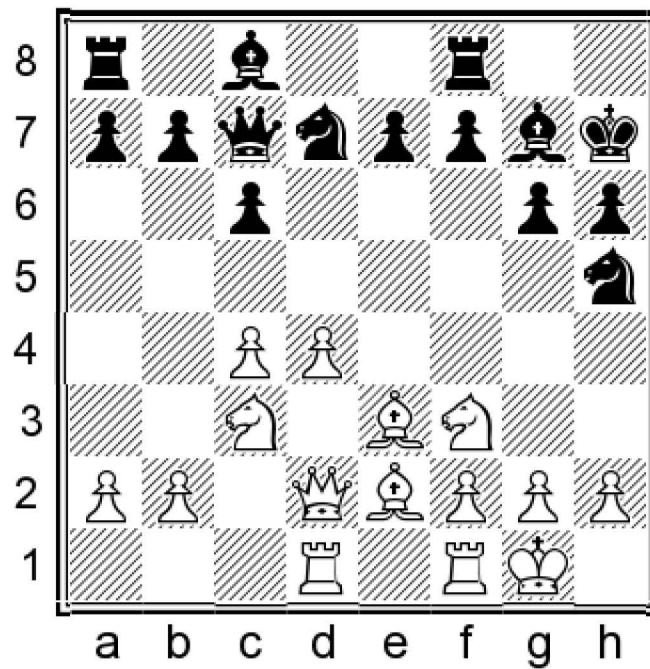
8...Nc7

8...N5f6 9.Nc3 Bg7 10.Bf4 0-0 11.0-0



Position after: 11.0-0

A) Black didn't manage to solve his problems with 11...Nh5 in Efimenko, Z (2640) – Nisipeanu, L (2661) Rijeka 2010, which continued 12.Bg5 h6 13.Be3 Qc7 14.Qd2 Kh7 15.Rad1

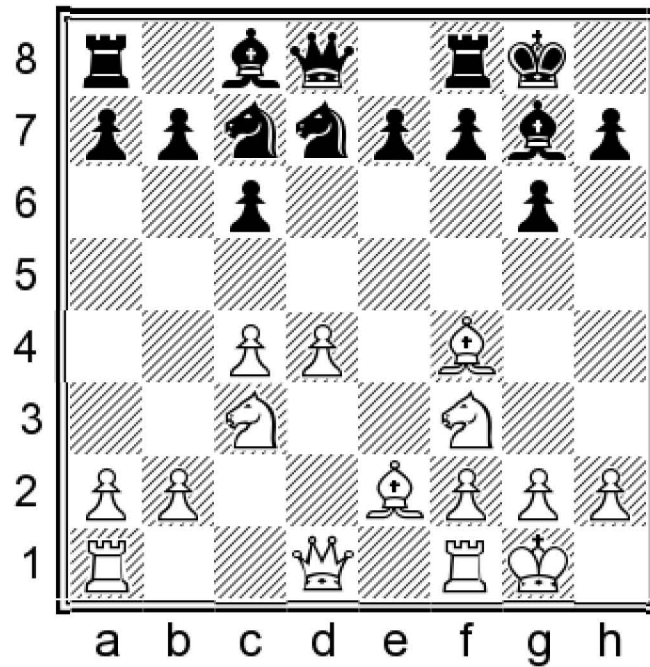


Position after: 15.Rd1

15...Rd8 [an adequate reaction to the weakening 15...f5 is 16.Qc1; whereas after 15...e5 16.Rfe1 the white troops are better placed for the eventual opening of the position] 16.g4! Nhf6 17.Bf4 and White stood clearly better.

B) 11...Nb6 12.Qd2 Bg4 13.b3 a5 14.h3 Bxf3 15.Bxf3 Michiels, B (2462) – Sargissian, G (2668) Antwerp 2009. Black didn't have much to show for having conceded the pair of bishops.

9.0-0 Bg7 10.Nc3 0-0 11.Bf4



Position after: 11.Bf4

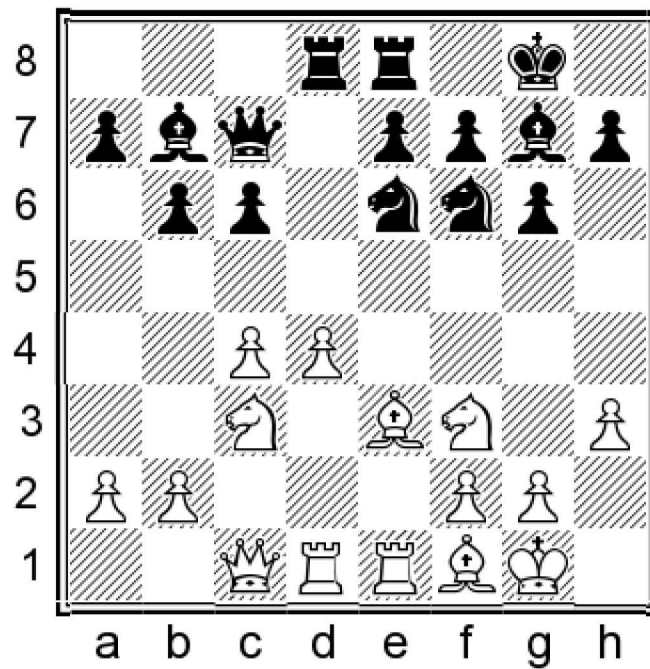
At this crossroads two recent high-level encounters diverge, although the assessment in half a dozen moves will be similar.

11...Ne6

11...Nf6 12.h3 Bf5 13.Be5 Ne4 14.Bxg7 Kxg7 15.Re1 Nf6 16.Qd2 Qd6 17.Rad1 Rad8 18.Qe3² Eljanov, P (2734) – Kasimdzhanov, R (2676) Douglas 2017.

12.Be3 b6 13.Re1 Bb7 14.Bf1 Re8 15.Qd2 Nf6 16.h3 Qc7 17.Rad1 Rad8 18.Qc1²

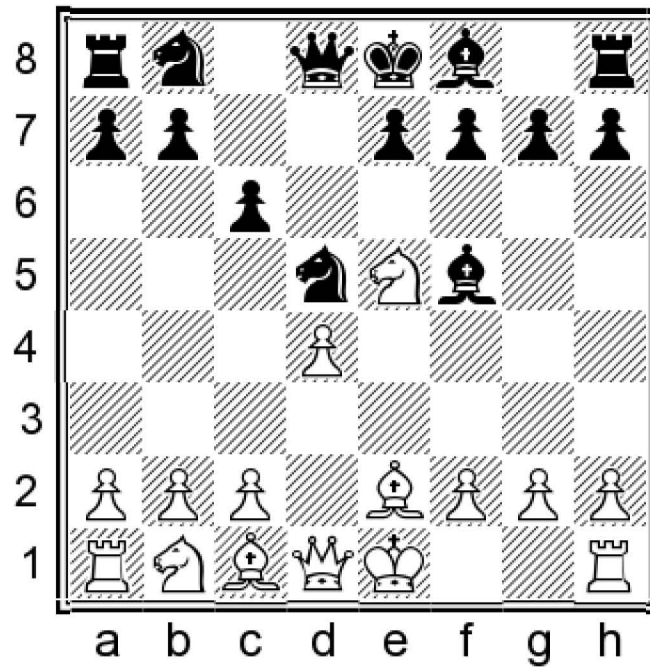
Tomashevsky, E (2728) – Mamedyarov, S (2747) Huaian (blitz) 2016.



Position after: 18.Qc1²

White has more ways to improve his position and it is hard for his opponent to undertake any active operation. The desirable ...c6-c5, for instance, would worsen the situation in view of d4-d5.

j) 5...c6 6.Be2 Bf5 7.0-0 Nd7 8.-- (Over the Board Practice) 1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.Nf3 dxe5 5.Nxe5 c6 6.Be2 Bf5!



Position after: 6...Bf5!

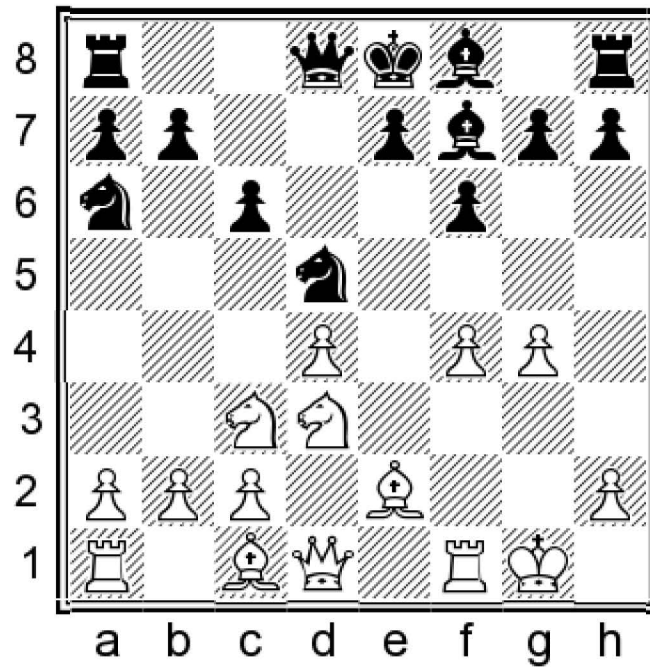
Moving the bishop out of the pawn chain before playing ...e7-e6 is by far Black's most popular choice, in connection with 7...Nd7 on the next move.

The consequences of a subsequent c2-c4 ...Nb4 would then very much depend on the circumstances, while the wild 7.g2-g4 push is double-edged.

7.0-0

7.g4 Be6

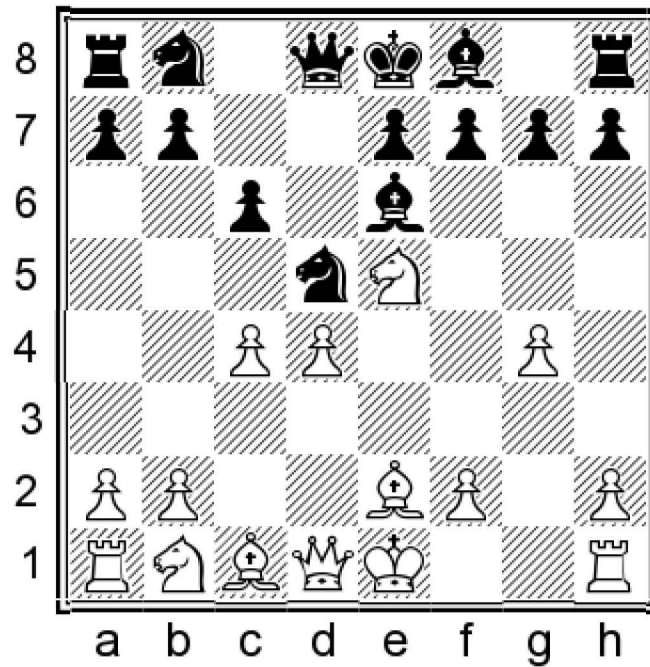
A) 8.f4 f6 9.Nd3 Bf7 10.0-0 Na6 11.Nc3



Position after: 11.Nc3

11...e6 [English GM Nigel Short varies from the move he had chosen seven years earlier, 11...Nxc3. Following 12.bxc3 g6 13.Qe1 Bg7 the game was unclear, Polgar, J (2685) – Short, N (2684) Bled 2002.] 12.Nxd5 Qxd5 13.Be3 Be7 14.Bf3 Qd7 ∞ Navara, D (2638) – Short, N (2663) Wijk aan Zee 2009.

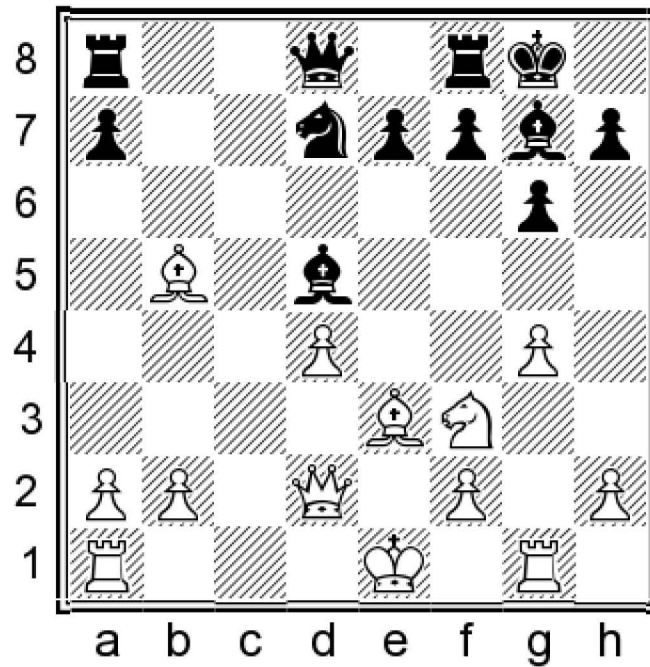
B) 8.c4



Position after: 8.c4

B1) 8...Nb6 9.b3 f6 10.Nd3 Qxd4 11.Bb2 Qd7 As you can see in the 5.Nxe5 c6 correspondence section, this retreat is the most precise.
[11...Qd8 12.Nc3 Na6 13.Qd2 Qc7 14.0-0-0 0-0-0 15.Qe3 Bf7 16.f4© Kasparov, G (2838) – Short, N (2682) Moscow 2002.]

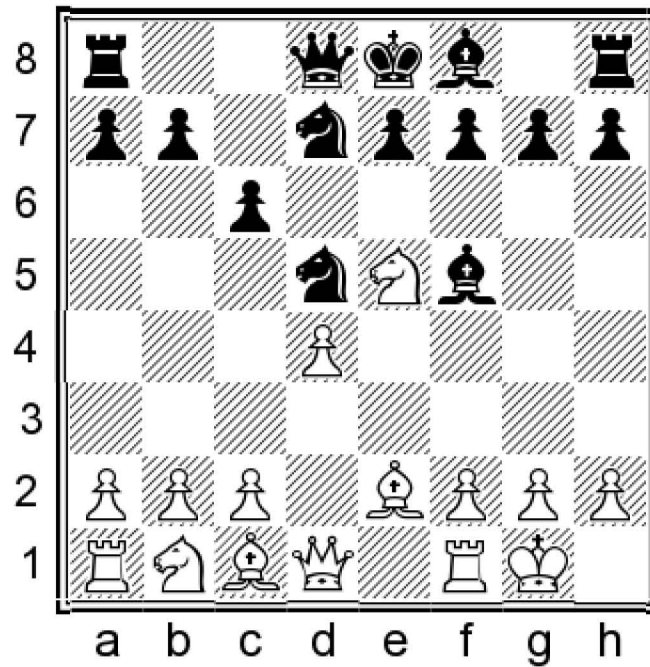
B2) 8...Nc7 9.Rg1 Nd7 10.Nf3 g6 11.Nc3 Bg7 12.Be3 0-0 13.Qd2 b5!
14.cxb5 cxb5 15.Nxb5 Nxb5 16.Bxb5 Bd5



Position after: 16...Bd5

Anand, V (2801) – Carlsen, M (2714) Moscow (blitz) 2007. Black undoubtedly had sufficient compensation for the pawn because of the vulnerable enemy king.

7...Nd7

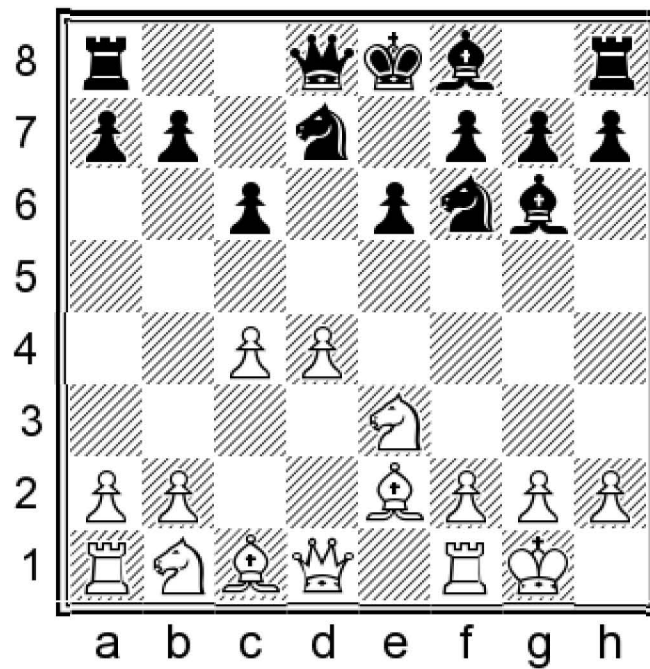


Position after: 7...Nd7

We have arrived at an important juncture, where White's most popular reply by far is 8.Nf3 (see the following subchapter). The alternatives to that retreat are however numerous and we shall have a look at them.

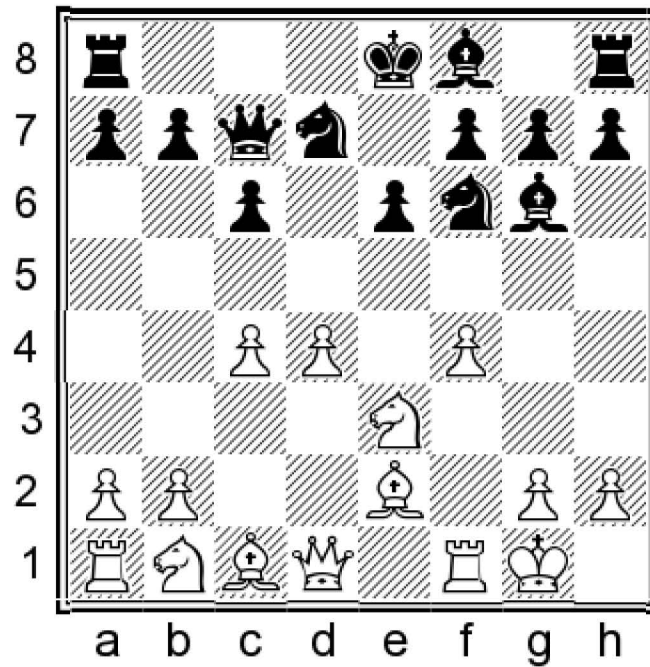
8.Bg4

A) 8.Ng4 e6 9.c4 N5f6 10.Ne3 Bg6



Position after: 10...Bg6

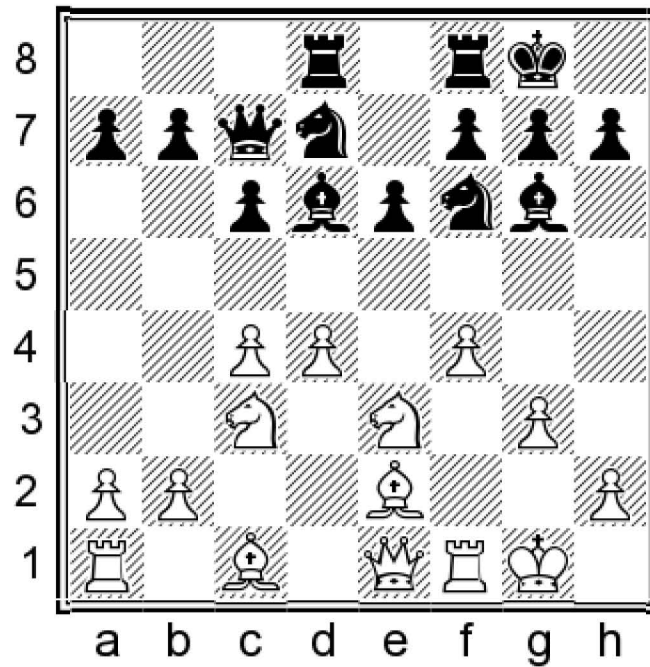
Black seems just fine here from a theoretical standpoint, whether his opponent goes for the double-edged 11.f4 or 11.Nc3 Bd6= Grischuk, A (2715) – Carlsen, M (2714) Moscow (blitz) 2007. Black could also play 11...Qc7, when White does not yet have sufficient development to sustain a pawn attack.



Position after: 11...Qc7

A1) 12.f5?! is premature according to some ChessBase annotation. Indeed, following 12...exf5 13.Nxf5 Bxf5 14.Rxf5 Bd6 15.h3 Ne4 the downside of having pushed the f- and h-pawns becomes apparent, and White barely holds things together with 16.Rf3.

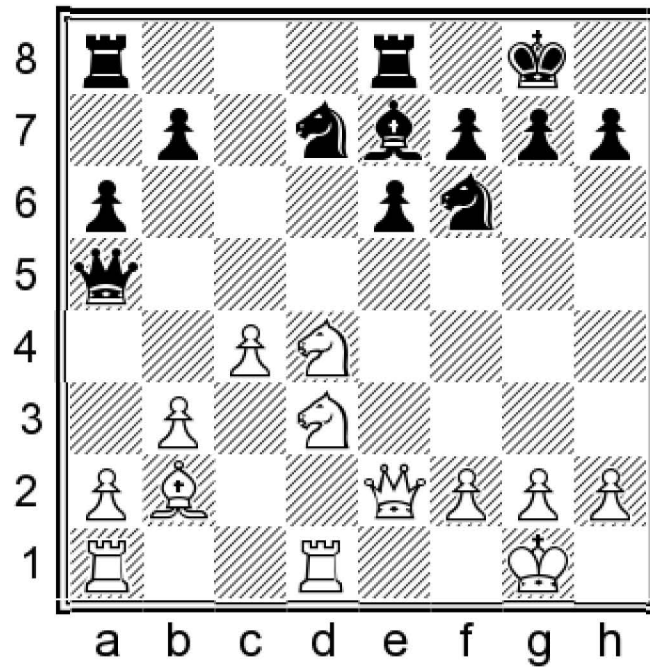
A2) 12.Nc3 Bd6 13.g3 Rd8 14.Qe1 0-0



Position after: 14...0-0

White's somewhat unusual development is compensated for by his advantage in space. The time has come for resolute action. 15.c5 Be7 16.f5 exf5 17.Nxf5 Bxf5 18.Rxf5 Rfe8 19.Qf2 Kamsky, G (2744) – Benjamin, J (2559) Rockville 2012. At this stage Black could already have played the undermining ...b7-b6, which he delayed in favor of 19...Nf8∞.

B) 8.Bd3 Bxd3 9.Nxd3 e6 10.Nd2 Be7 11.c4 N5f6 12.Nf3 0-0 13.Qe2 c5 14.Rd1 cxd4 15.Nxd4 Re8 16.b3 a6 17.Bb2 Qa5²

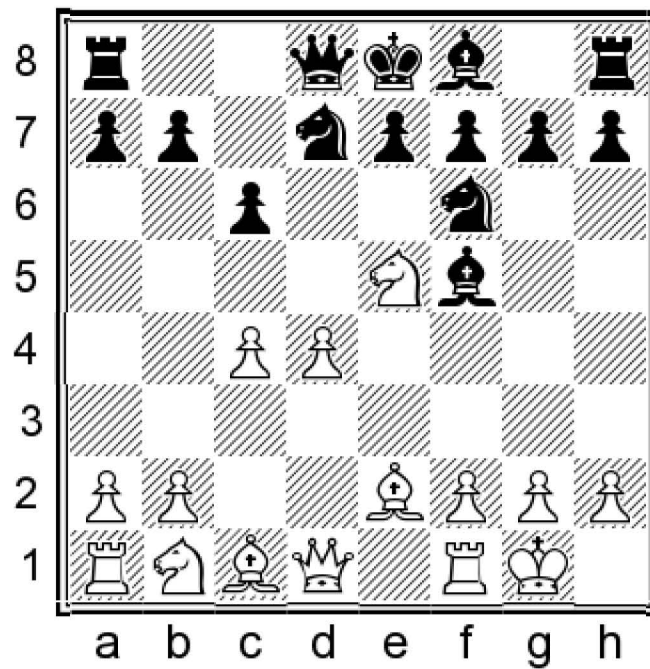


Position after: 17...Qa5²

Najer, E – Yuffa, D Moscow (rapid) 2020. White has a bit more space, but this is quite manageable for Black who can consider ...Ba3 in the current position.

C) 8.c4

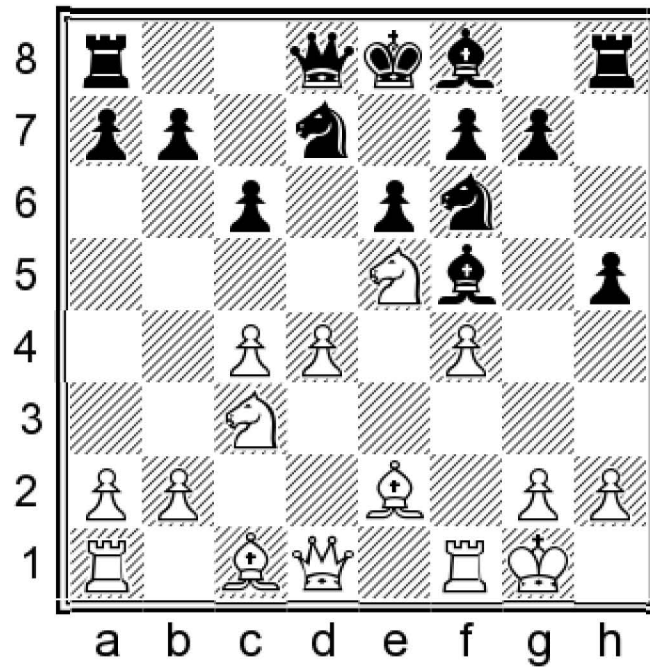
C1) 8...N5f6



Position after: 8...N5f6

At this crossroads White has a choice between the solid 9.Bf4 and the more ambitious but somewhat weakening 9.f4.

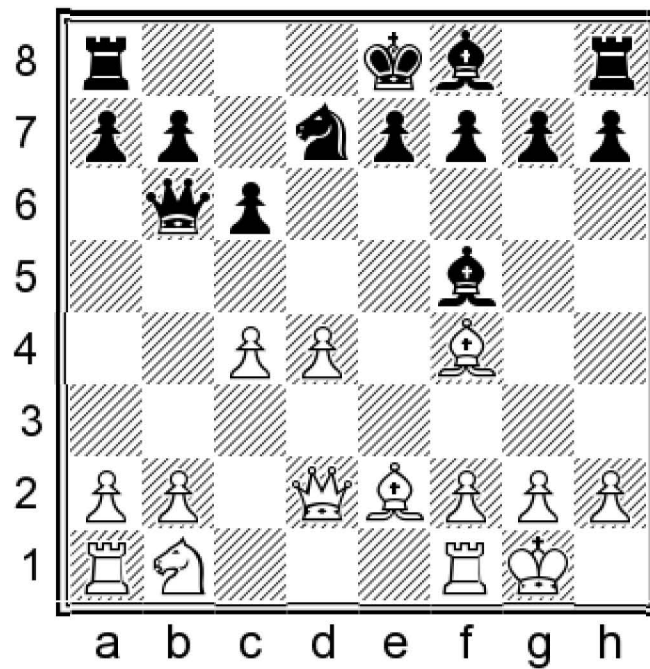
C1.1) 9.f4!? h5 [9...e6?! gave White a large edge after 10.g4 Bxb1 11.Rxb1 Mullan, J (2442) – Degraeve, J (2569) St-Chely d'Aubrac 2010.] 10.Nc3 e6



Position after: 10...e6

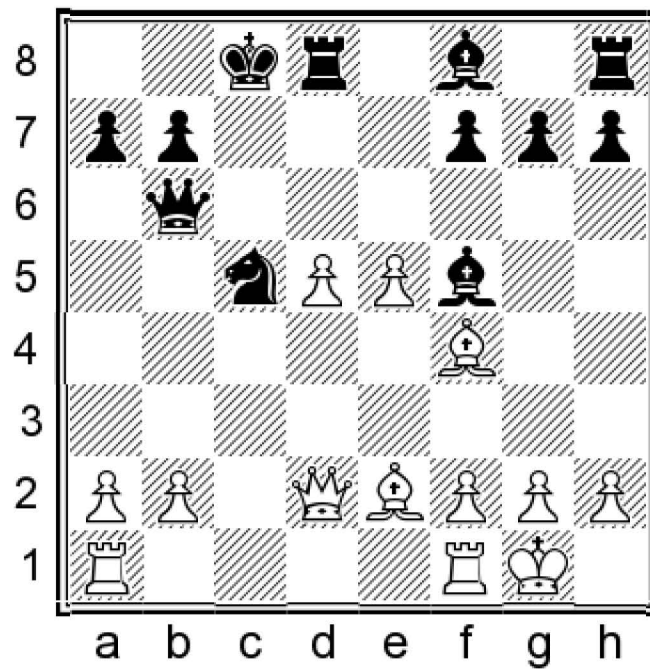
In the rapid game Wei, Y (2748) – Maghsoodloo, P (2569) Ashkhabad 2017, White played 11.Be3 but the computer prefers one of the following alternatives: 11.a3, 11.h3 or 11.Bf3, with a slight plus in all cases.

C1.2) 9.Bf4 Qb6 10.Nxd7 Nxd7 11.Qd2



Position after: 11.Qd2

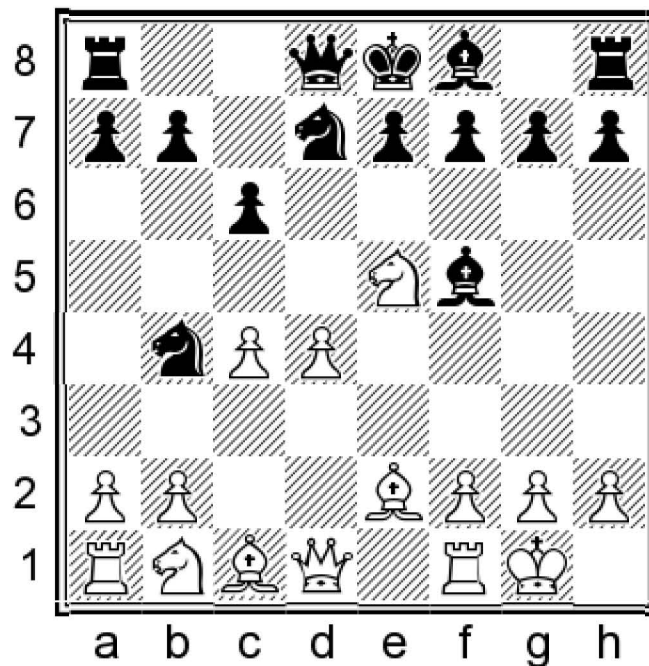
This position was reached in Smeets, J (2632) – Short, N (2684) London 2009, where Black decided to free himself with the pawn sacrifice 11...e5!?. White could have declined it and gone for 12.Be3!?, while after the game continuation 12.dxe5 0-0-0 13.Nc3 Nc5 the black compensation was pretty decent. The Dutchman uncorked the interesting 14.Nd5 (14.Qe3 was a more academic option), obtaining two strong central pawns and chances of an attack on the enemy king following 14...cxd5 15.cxd5.



Position after: 15.cxd5

15...Kb8?!² [The engine gives Black a slight edge after 15...Ne4!
16.Qc2+ Kb8 17.Bd3 Rc8 18.Qe2 Qg6³.]

C2) 8...Nb4

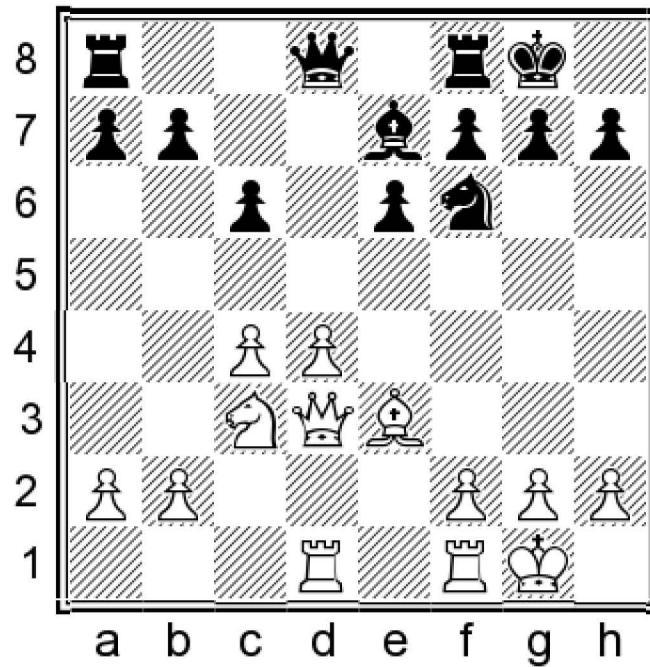


Position after: 8...Nb4

C2.1) 9.g4 has been tried by correspondence players but is virgin territory in over-the-board practice. Then 9...Be4 10.Nxd7 Qxd7 11.Nc3 Bc2! 12.Qd2 Bg6 is messy. [The inferior 9...Bxb1?! 10.Rxb1 Nxe5 11.dxe5 Nxa2 12.Be3 gives White more than enough compensation for his pawn.]

C2.2) Or 9.Ng4 Nc2 10.Ne3 Nxe3 11.Bxe3 e6 and now 12.d5 seems to give White a little pull, so does 12.Nc3.

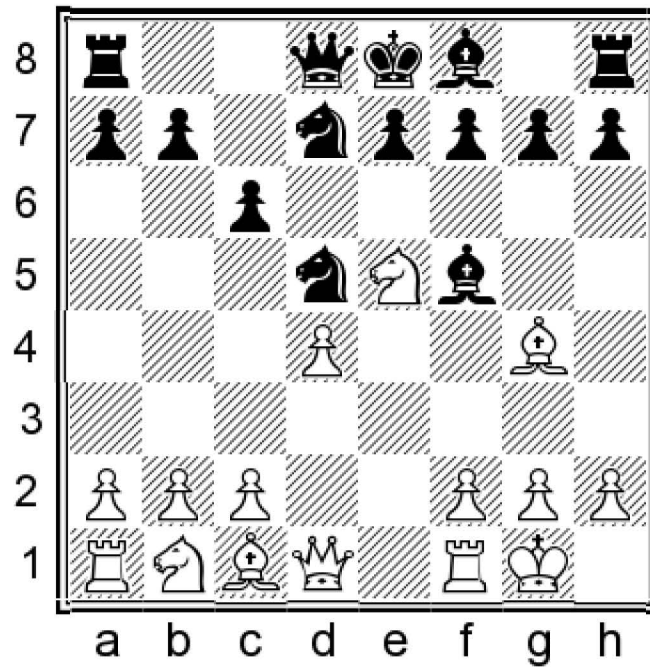
C2.3) 9.Nd3 Nxd3 Instead 9...e5!? also looks more pleasant for White if he continues 10.Re1 or 10.d5. 10.Bxd3 Bxd3 11.Qxd3 e6 12.Be3 Be7 13.Nc3 0-0 14.Rad1 Nf6.



Position after: 14...Nf6

In Kovalev, V (2648) – Movsesian, S (2649) chess.com 2020, 15.Bf4 would have been a tiny bit better for White. Black is, however, super-solid here, and holding shouldn't require too much care.

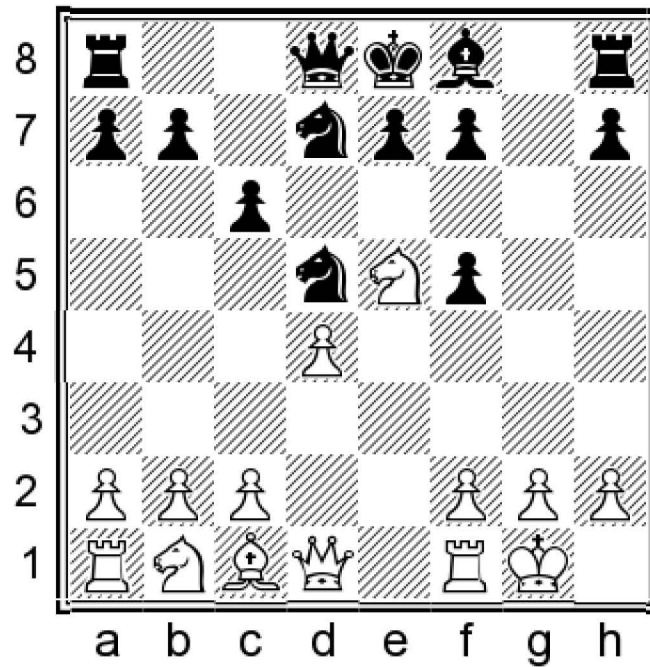
After 8.Bg4 Black has a choice.



Position after: 8.Bg4

8...Bxg4

The more daring 8...g6!? has been tried only once, namely in the blitz game Wang Hao (2736) – Ivanchuk, V (2775) Beijing 2011. Even though White could have secured a slight edge, I think this option is worth more practical tries. 9.Bxf5 gxf5

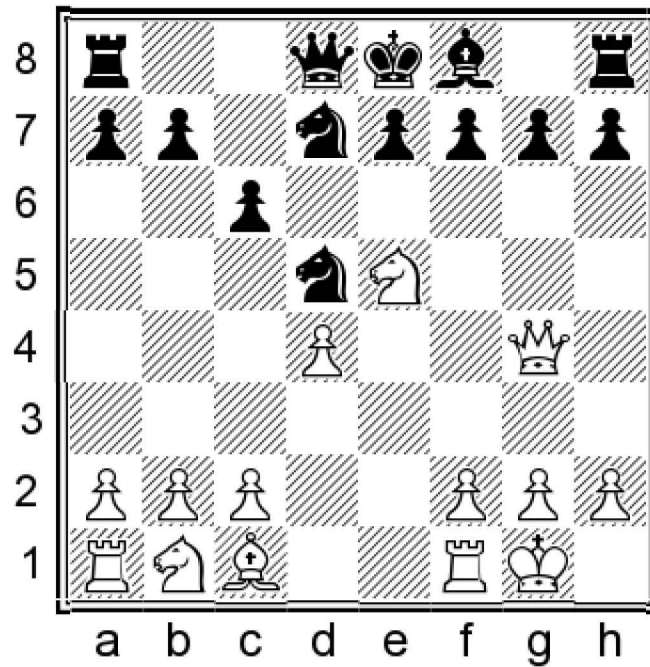


Position after: 9...gxf5

10.c4 Confronted with a novelty at a fast time control, White didn't react in the best way [he should likely have picked one of the following moves: 10.Nd3, 10.Qe2 or 10.Nf3]. 10...N5b6 11.Qe2?! Nxe5 12.dxe5 [12.Qxe5 Rg8 was also more promising for Black] Now, rather than 12...Na4?, which could have been punished by 13.e6!, Black would have gained a slight edge had he opted for 12...Qd4!.

9.Qxg4

9.Nxg4 e6 10.c4 N5f6 11.Nc3 Nxg4 12.Qxg4 Nf6 was around equal in Pogonina, N (2429) – Zhao Xue (2500) Krasnoturinsk 2007.

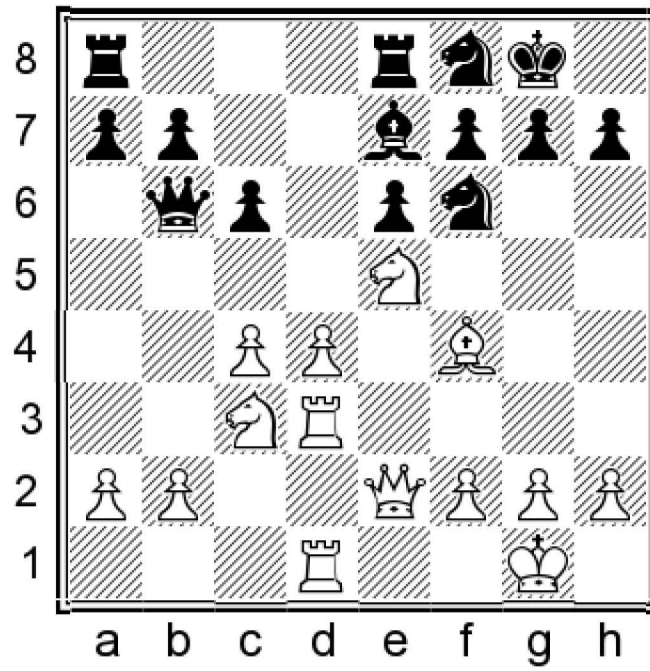


Position after: 9.Qxg4

Besides the exchange on e5 Black can now choose between two other natural moves, all three options being roughly of the same value.

9...g6

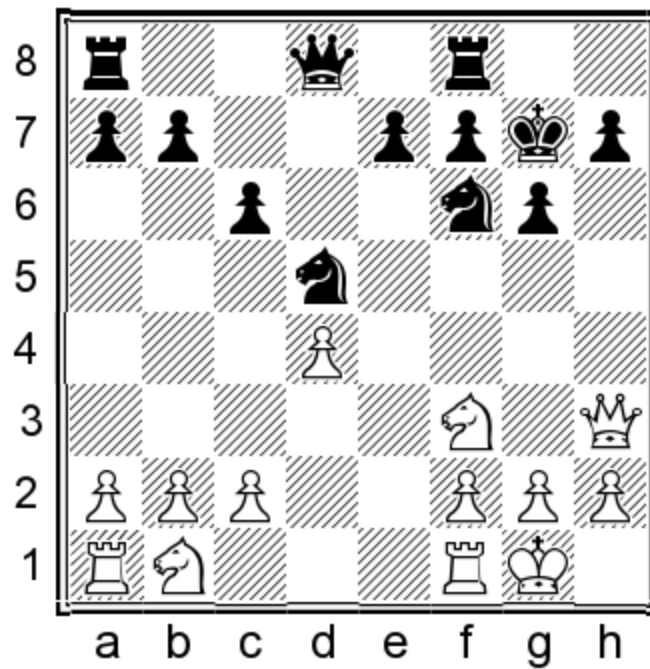
The fianchetto is more active than 9...e6 10.Rd1 N5f6 11.Qe2 Be7 12.c4 0-0 13.Nc3. This is similar to the previously mentioned game Caruana – Salgado Lopez. White had threatening kingside pressure after 13...Re8 14.Rd3 Nf8 15.Bf4 Qb6 16.Rad1².



Position after: 16.Rad1²

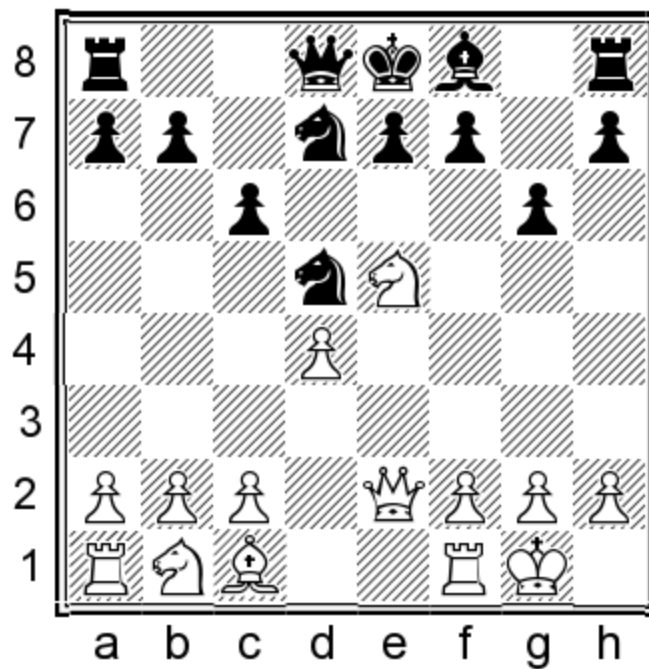
10.c4!

A) 10.Nf3 Bg7 11.Qh3 N7f6 12.Bh6 0-0 13.Bxg7 Kxg7



Position after: 13...Kxg7

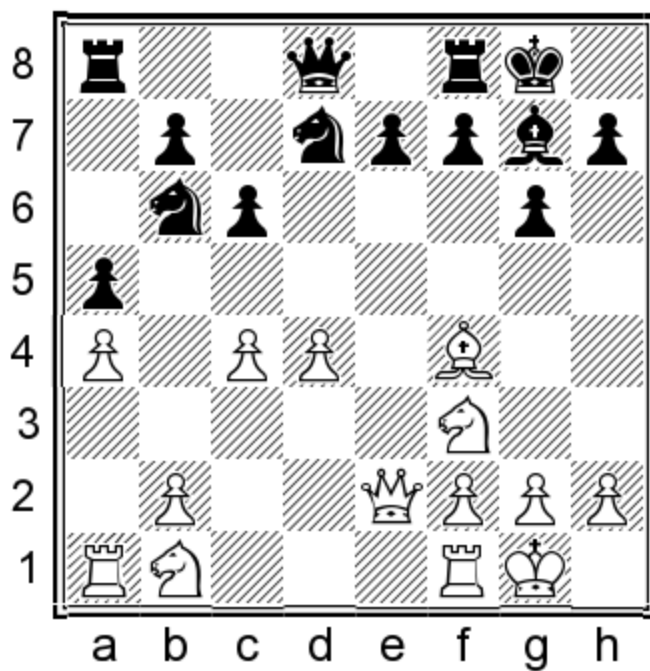
The position was already a bit more pleasant for Black, Alekseev, E (2683) – Vitiugov, N (2691) St Petersburg (rapid) 2012.



B) The rare bird 10.Qe2!?,

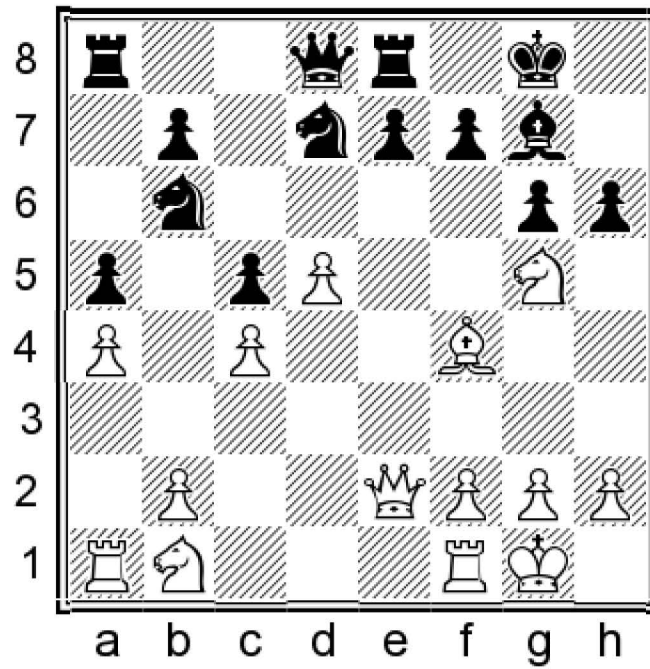
Position after: 10.Qe2!?

employed in Zhigalko, A (2566) – Gorovets, A (2408) Minsk 2011, deserves attention although c2-c4 will soon be required anyway. 10...Bg7 11.c4 N5b6 [or 11...Nxe5!? and now both 12.dxe5 Nc7 13.Rd1 Qc8 and 12.cxd5 Nd7 13.dxc6 bxc6 look acceptable for Black] 12.Nf3!? [Here or two moves later 12.Be3 was available, indirectly covering e5 because of Bxb6] 12...0-0 13.a4 a5 14.Bf4



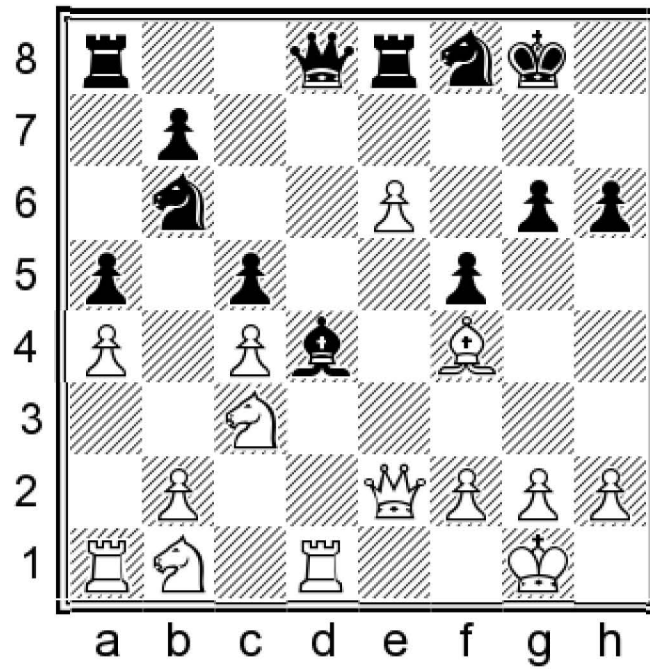
Position after: 14.Bf4

14...c5! 15.d5 Re8 16.Ng5?! (This move worked well in the actual game as following 16...Nc8?! 17.Nc3 White stood a bit better.) 16...h6! was correct.



Position after: 16...h6!

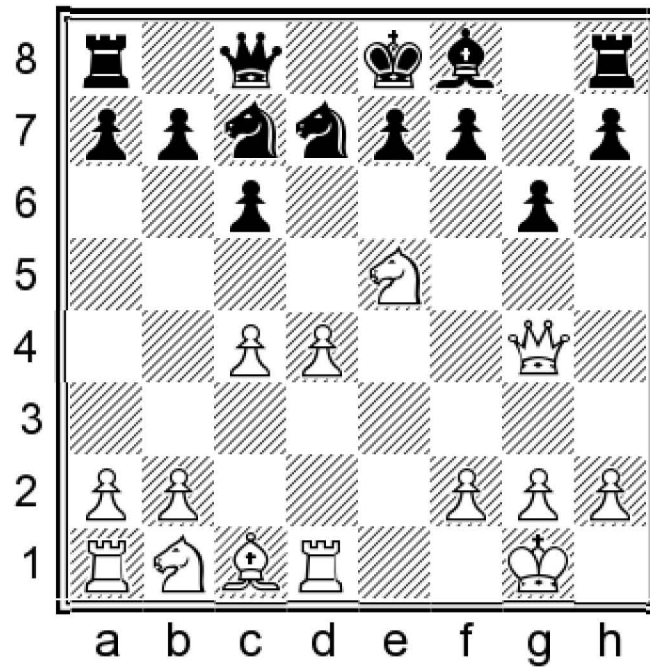
17.Ne4 [17.Nxf7!? isn't quite good enough after 17...Kxf7 18.Qe6+ Kf8
 19.Qxg6 e6³ followed by 20...Qf6] 17...f5 18.Nec3 e6 19.dxe6 Nf8 20.Rd1
 Bd4



Position after: 20...Bd4

Black plans 21...Nxe6 and possibly ...Qh4. He is very active and fully mobilized, while his opponent's queenside still needs to be developed.

10...Nc7 11.Rd1 Qc8

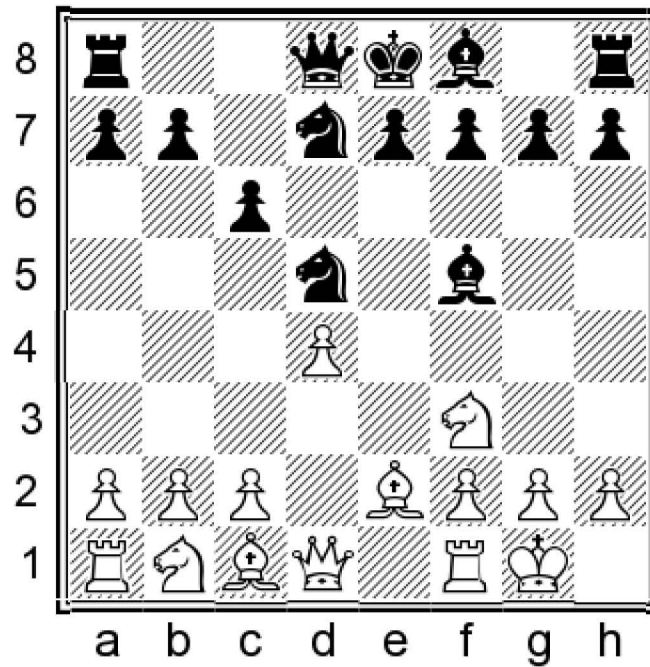


Position after: 11...Qc8

We're following the game Grischuk, A (2763) – Kamsky, G (2746) Istanbul 2012.

Black stands a bit worse here but he gradually equalized and then took over in that particular duel.

k) 5...c6 6.Be2 Bf5 7.0-0 Nd7 8.Nf3 (Over the Board Practice) 1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.Nf3 dxe5 5.Nxe5 c6 6.Be2 Bf5! 7.0-0 Nd7 8.Nf3

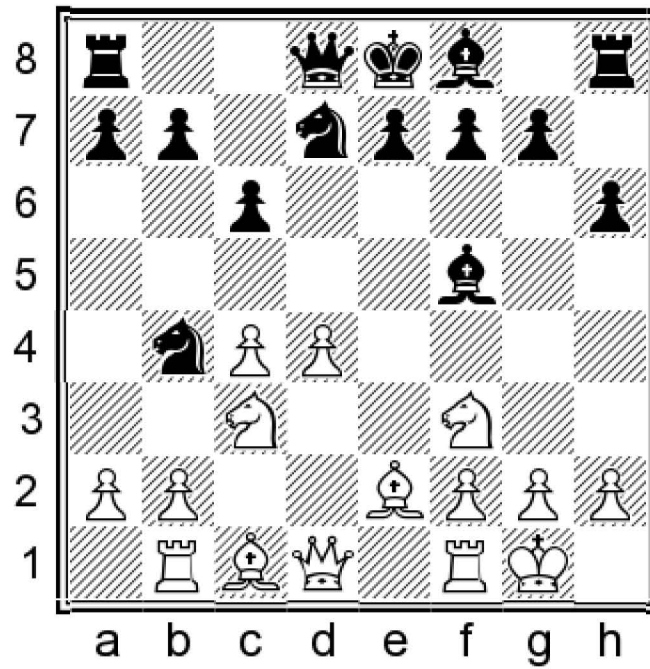


Position after: 8.Nf3

8...e6

A) 8...Qc7 9.Nh4 Be6 10.Re1 Rd8 11.Bf1 g6 12.c4 N5f6 13.Nc3 Bg7 14.h3 0-0 15.Be3² Grischuk, A (2772) – Ivanchuk, V (2726) Huaian (rapid) 2017.

B) 8...h6?! is analyzed more in detail in the 5.Nxe5 c6 correspondence section. 9.c4 N5f6 [Strangely, German IM Stefan Loeffler repeated the dubious variation 9...Nb4?! 10.Nc3 Nc2 11.Rb1 Nb4

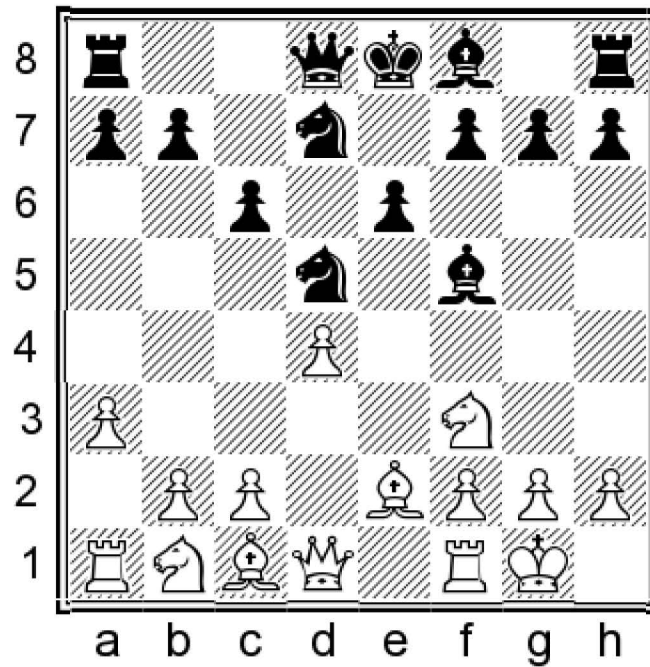


Position after: 11...Nb4

although he was aware of the strong 12.Be3! Bxb1 13.Qxb1f.]

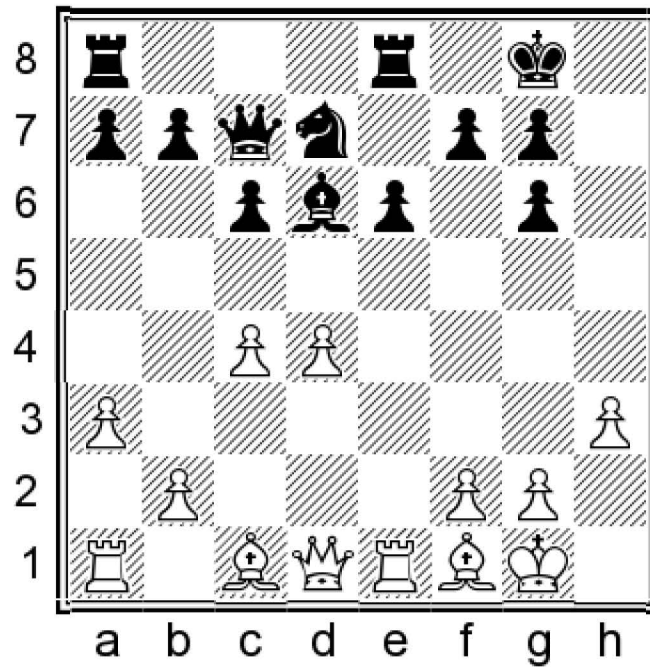
9.c4

9.a3 is sometimes played, but as we will see in the next comment it is not really necessary.



Position after: 9.a3

9...Bd6 [9...Be7 10.c4 N5f6 11.Nc3 h6 12.Bf4 0-0 13.d5 exd5 14.cxd5 Nxd5 15.Nxd5 cxd5 16.Qxd5 Be6 17.Qxb7² Rublevsky, S (2676) – Carlsen, M (2714) Moscow (blitz) 2007; Black doesn't have enough for his missing pawn.] 10.Re1 0-0 11.c4 N5f6 12.Nc3 Re8 13.h3 Qc7 14.Nh4 Ne4 15.Nxe4 Bxe4 16.Bf1 Bg6 17.Nxg6 hxg6 Tukhaev, A (2517) – Miroshnichenko, E (2680) Alushta 2009.



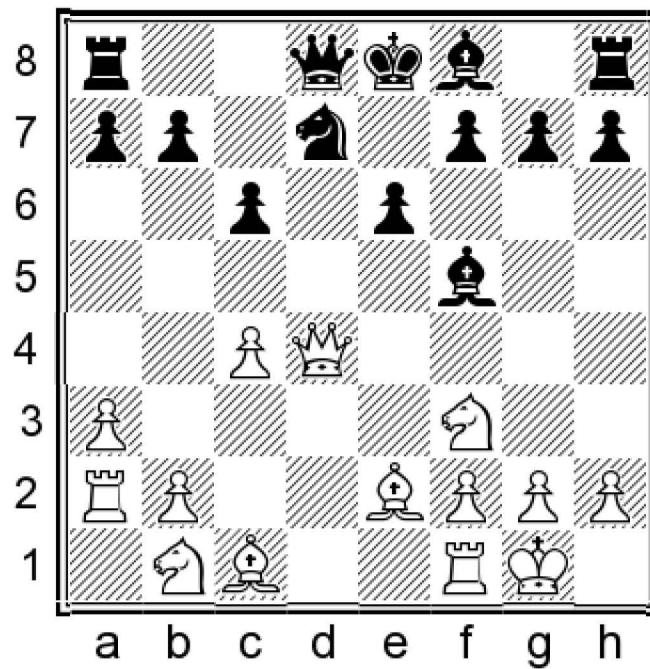
Position after: 17...hxg6

In comparison with similar positions with an extra pair of knights, Black is probably closer to equality here.

9...N5f6

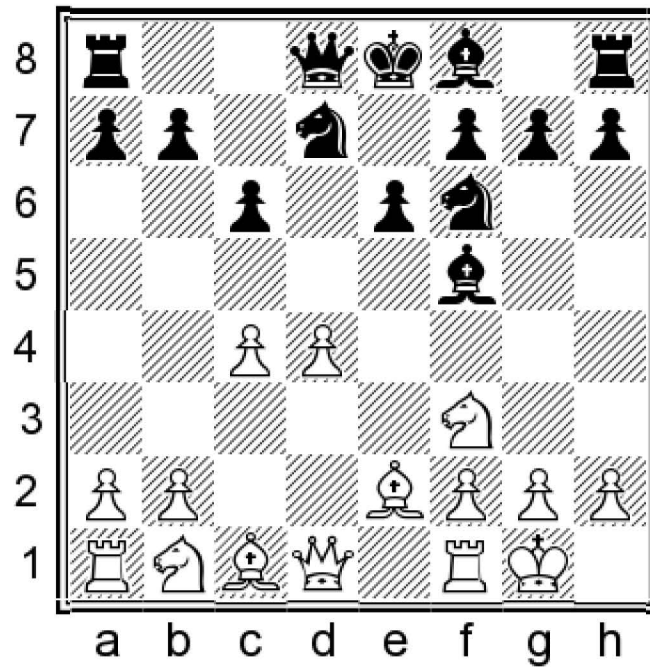
The best square for the knight, defending the kingside and controlling d5.

9...Nb4?! starts a risky adventure: 10.a3! Nc2 11.Ra2 Nxd4 12.Qxd4.



Position after: 12.Qxd4

12...c5 [Taking at once doesn't change much: 12...Bxb1 13.Bg5 f6 14.Rxb1 fxg5 15.Rd1±.] 13.Qc3 Bxb1 14.Bg5 f6 15.Rxb1 fxg5 16.Qe3± White had more than enough compensation for a mere pawn: Carlsen, M (2552) – Madsen, D (2287) Trondheim 2004.

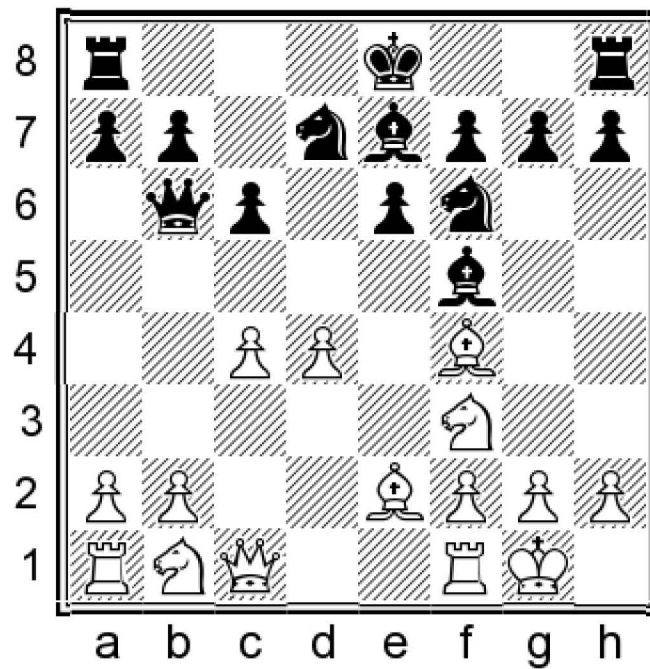


Position after: 9...N5f6

10.Nc3

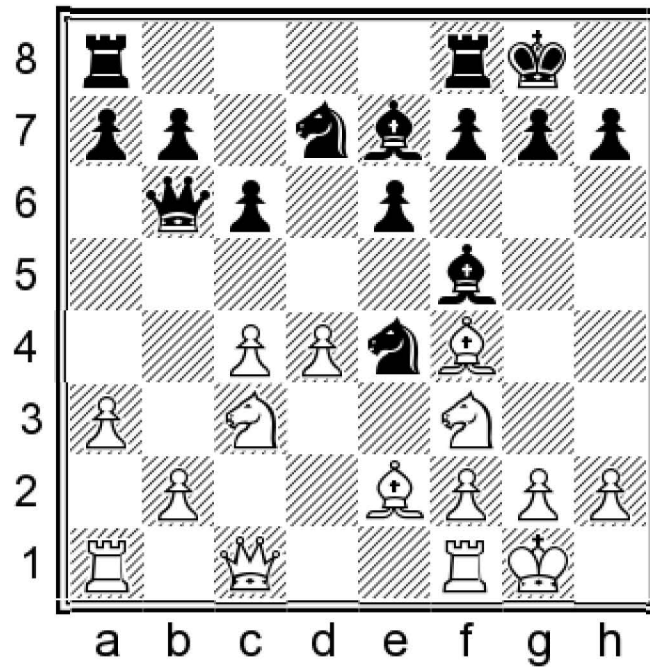
10.Bf4!? I am not entirely sure why this move is sometimes preferred over the more natural and more popular 10.Nc3.

A) 10...Qb6 11.Qc1 The most consistent way of defending b2. 11...Be7



Position after: 11...Be7

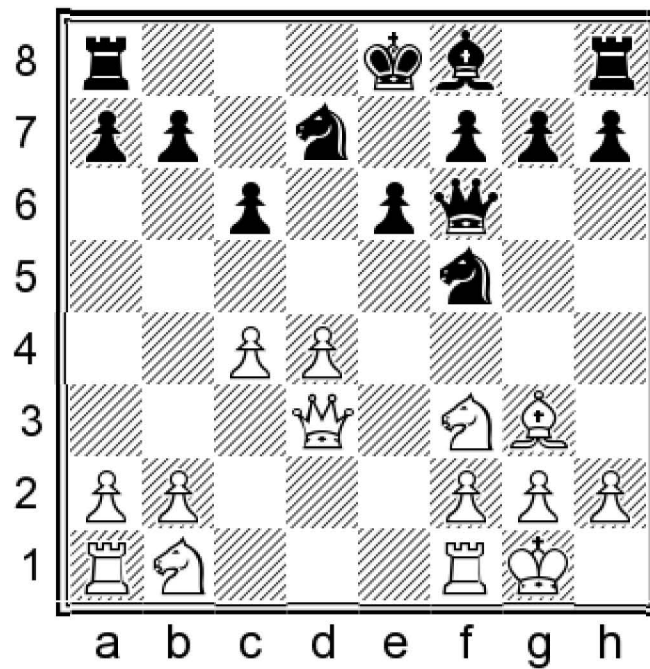
12.Nc3 [12.Rd1 h6 13.Nc3 0-0 14.c5 Qd8 15.b4 a6 16.Nd2 Nd5 17.Nxd5 exd5 Palac, M (2573) – Markus, R (2673) Mati Losinj 2017; this looks fully OK for Black.] 12...0-0 13.a3 Preparing the queenside expansion. [13.c5!? followed by b2-b4 would probably have saved the tempo a2-a3, but conceded the d5 square.] 13...Ne4



Position after: 13...Ne4

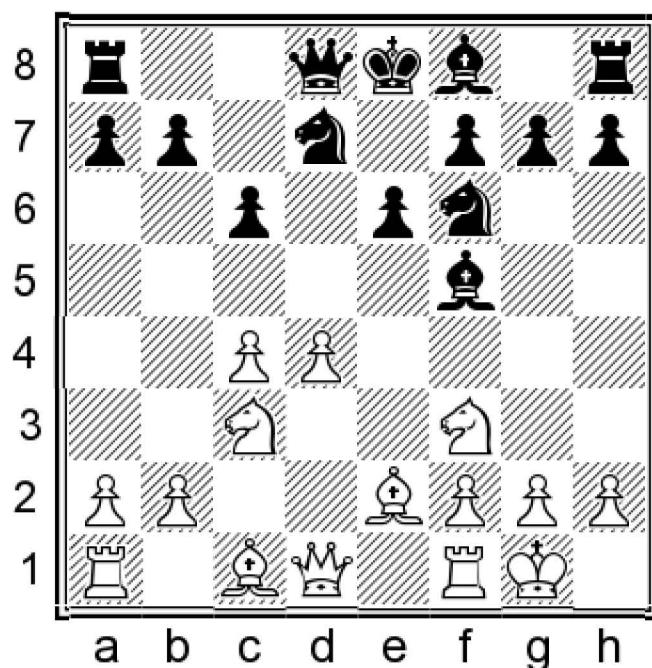
A familiar pattern: Black aims to get some relief by trading pieces. 14.b4 Nxc3 15.Qxc3² Ponomarev, R (2741) – Kamsky, G (2762) Tashkent 2012.

B) Even if it does not lead to the knight exchange, 10...Ne4 makes some sense, here, too. It is the start of an original regrouping. 11.Bd3 Qf6 12.Qe2 Nd6 13.Bg3 Bxd3 14.Qxd3 Nf5



Position after: 14...Nf5

Bacrot, E – Degraeve, JM Belfort 2010. White played 15.Qb3 0-0-0, with an unclear game [the engine prefers 15.Nc3²]. Now let's return to the main line!



Position after: 10.Nc3

10...Bd6

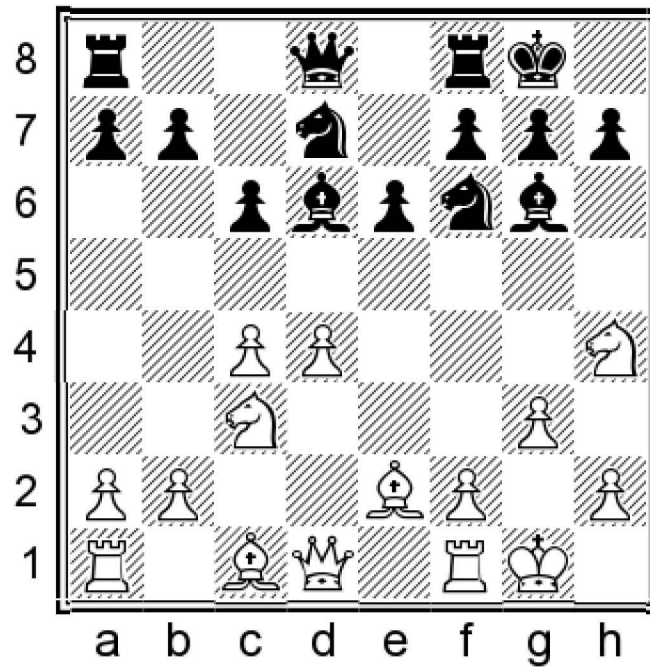
Black can also simplify with the trade 10...Ne4 11.Nxe4 Bxe4 or go 10...Qc7, which could transpose into the main line. The encounter Balogh, C – Sergeev, V Eforie Nord 2008, for instance, continued 10...Qc7 11.Nh4 Bg6 12.Bf3 Bd6 13.g3 0-0 and so on.

The experimental 10...Bb4?!, on the other hand, proved a risky strategy in Shashikant, K (2340) – Short, N (2655) Nagpur 2008, which continued 11.Bf4 Bxc3?! 12.bxc3 0-0 13.Qb3 Qc8 14.Nh4 Bg4 15.f3 Bh5 16.g4 Bg6 17.Bd6 Rd8 18.Nxg6 hxg6 19.g5 with a sizeable advantage to White.

11.Nh4 Bg6 12.g3

12.f4 also makes sense: 12...Ne4 13.Nxg6 Nxc3 14.bxc3 hxg6² Sutovsky, E (2676) – Miroshnichenko, E (2690) Kragujevac 2009.

12...0-0



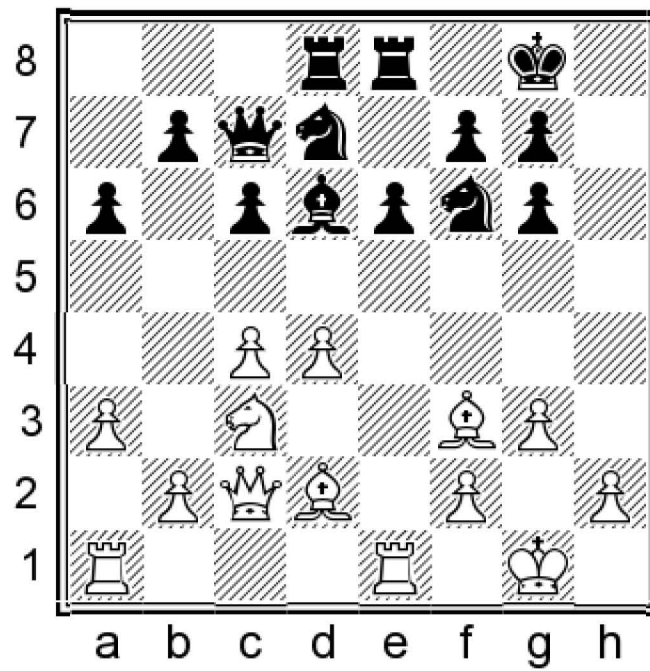
Position after: 12...0-0

13.Nxg6

A) 13.Bf3 e5 14.Nxg6 hxg6 15.d5 cxd5 16.Nxd5 e4 17.Bg2 Re8 18.Bg5²
Brkic, A (2593) – Yuffa, D (2594) lichess.org 2020.

B) Or 13.Be3 Ne4 14.Nxg6 Nxc3 15.bxc3 hxg6 16.Rb1 b6 17.Qa4²
Demchenko, A (2660) – Yu, Y (2751) Riyadh (rapid) 2017.

**13...hxg6 14.Bf3 a6 15.Re1 Re8 16.Bg5 Qa5 17.Bd2 Qc7 18.a3 Rad8
19.Qc2**



Position after: 19.Qc2

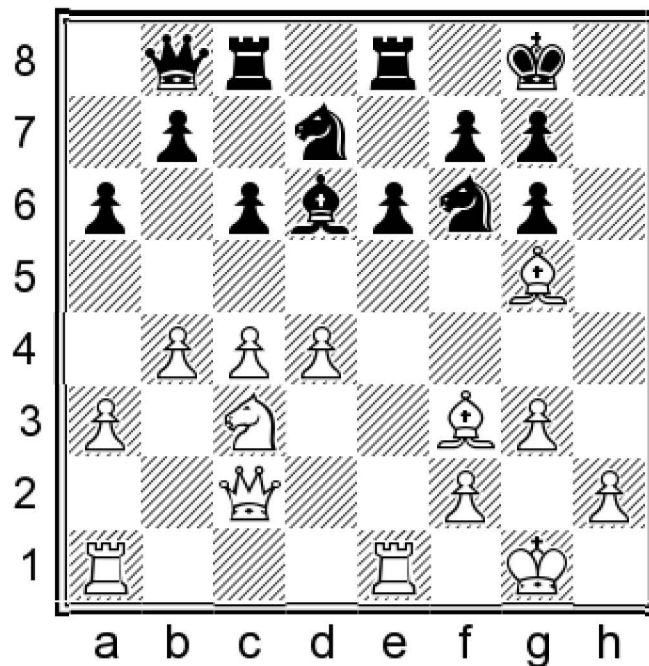
19...Qb8

Maybe that's a bit passive.

A) 19...c5!?

B) 19...e5!?

20.Bg5 Rc8 21.b4²



Position after: 21.b4²

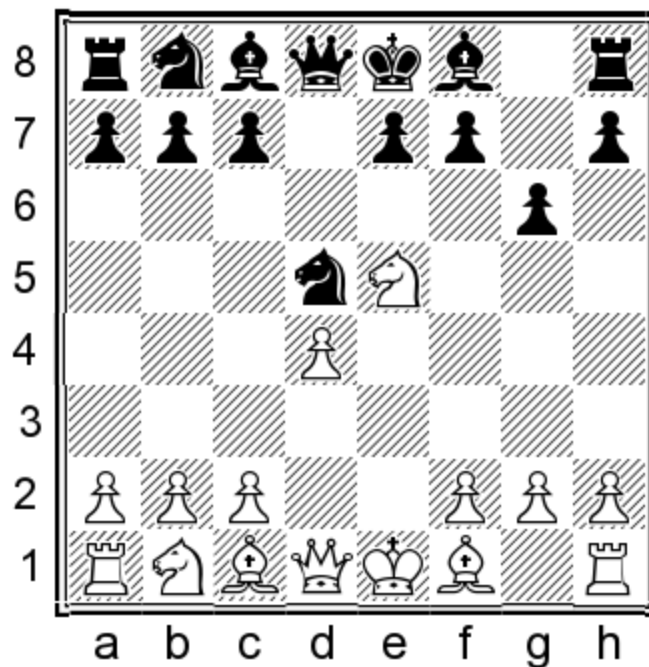
Karjakin, S (2775) – Kamsky, G (2762) Beijing (blitz) 2012.

One may notice an interesting feature of the line 4.Nf3 dxe5 5.Nxe5, and this remark is valid for both 5...c6 and 5...g6: quite a few top players have used it, but mostly at a fast time control. One reason for that fact is possibly that the black position is quite resilient, and rather often easy to handle, even if slightly worse. White has early on to make up his mind between retreating with Ne5-f3, or allowing an eventual change of the pawn structure linked with ...Nxe5 dxe5. While it is not clear which side will benefit from such a trade, it seems that most of the time pushing c2-c4 will be a must if White wants to develop any kind of initiative.

Another characteristic evolution of that line involves the swap Nf3-h4xBg6 (or sometimes xBf5), when Black has conceded the pair of bishops but remains solid. Then, and even though the opening of the position should in principle favor White, Black might have to seek counterplay with a timely ...c6-c5 or ...e6-e5 in order not to be condemned to passivity.

1) 5...g6 6.h3, 6.Qf3

1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.Nf3 dxe5 5.Nxe5 g6

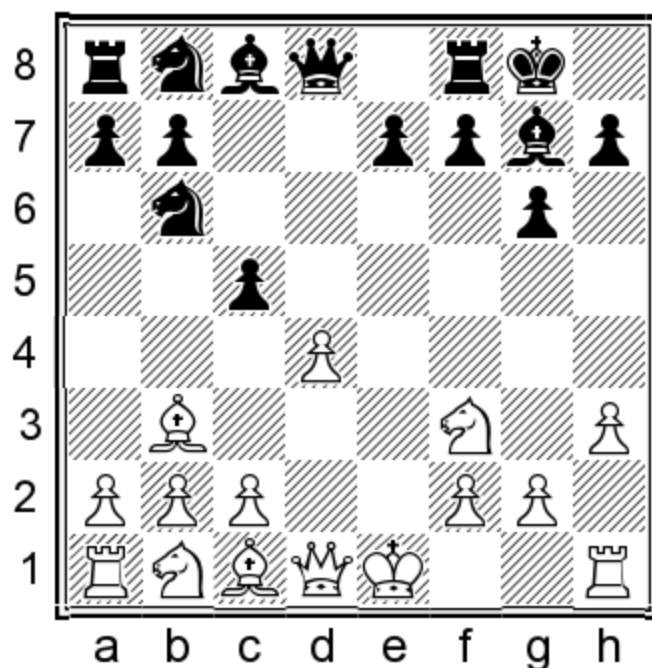


Position after: 5...g6

In comparison with 5...c6, this move, a favorite of Latvian GM Kengis in the 90s, entails two minor drawbacks. The first one is that Black already indicates he will fianchetto his dark-squared bishop. The second one is that 6.c4, which is effectively White's second most popular choice, makes sense, whereas after 5...c6 that very same 6.c4?! push would be answered by 6...Nb4!. In return for those small inconveniences Black also gets pluses: he can sometimes throw his c-pawn to c5 in one go, and except for 6.Bc4 and 6.c4 all other white options, like 6.g3 or 6.Be2 for instance, seem rather harmless.

6.Qf3

6.h3?! This approach already deserves a “?!” sign as being too slow. Its idea is to prevent a subsequent ...Bg4xf3, reckoning that White has more space and thus exchanges tend to ease Black’s life. I have included the following game since it has been played recently between two strong protagonists and because it shows that Black can sometimes seize the initiative early on, in this otherwise fairly solid line. 6...Bg7 7.Nf3 Otherwise 7...c5! comes. 7...0-0 8.Bc4?! Nb6 9.Bb3 c5!

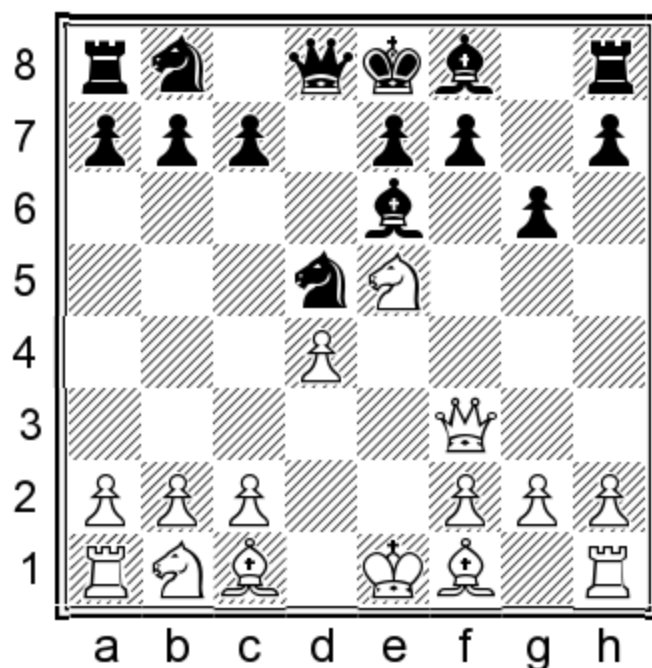


Position after: 9...c5!

Taking profit from the fact that Black started with 5...g6 and not 5...c6, and thus hasn’t lost a tempo by moving his c-pawn twice. 10.dxc5 It was already difficult to find good advice for White. 10...Qxd1+ 11.Kxd1 N6d7 12.Nc3 Nxc5 13.Be3 Nxb3 14.axb3 Nc6 This was Van Foreest, J (2682) – Gledura, B (2620) chess.com 2020, where his two bishops and sounder pawn structure secured Black a neat edge out of the opening phase.

6...Be6

6... f6 Is ugly but not unplayable, as rightly mentioned by C&K. There is however no reason to resort to this sort of move.



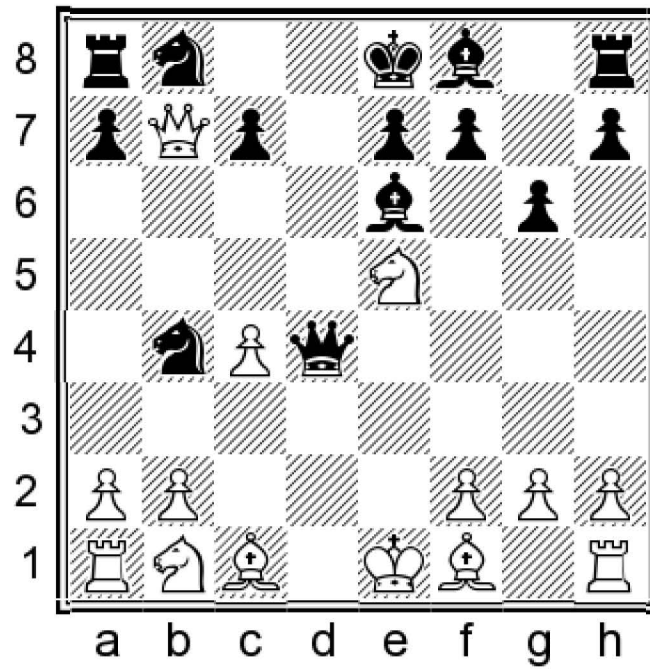
Position after: 6...Be6

7.c4!?

White initiates a tactical skirmish, after which there is no way back. Black is ready for this and the game should apparently peter out into a draw with best play.

7.Bc4 – see 6.Bc4 Be6 7.Qf3.

7...Nb4 8.Qxb7 Qxd4

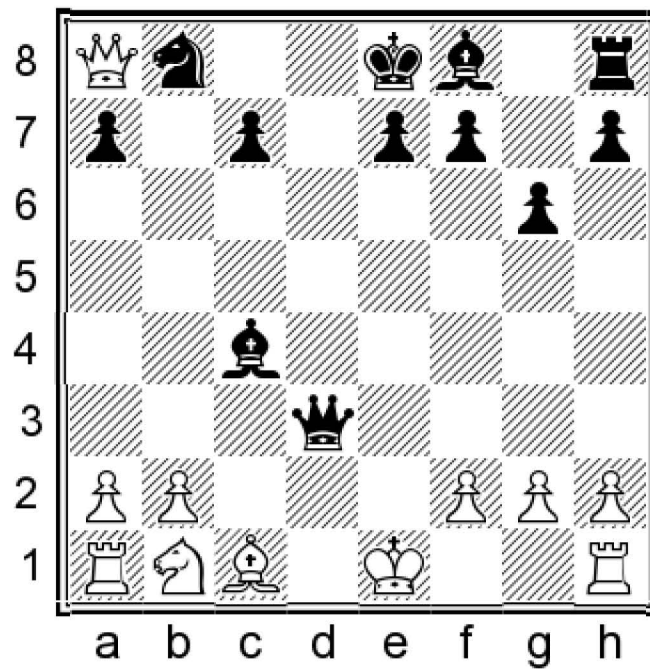


Position after: 8...Qxd4

9.Qxa8

9.Nd3

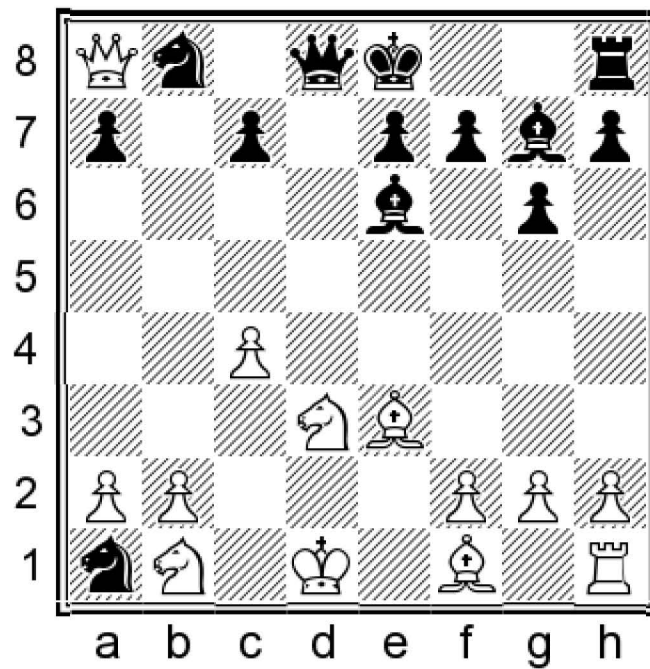
A) 9...Nxd3+! Sacrificing the exchange is Black's best option. 10.Bxd3 Qxd3 11.Qxa8 Bxc4



Position after: 11...Bxc4

Now or after 12.Nc3 Bg7 the queen has to protect her monarch with 12.Qf3, because the greedy 12.Qxb8+?? would lose in embarrassing fashion after 12...Kd7 13.Nc3 Bg7–+.

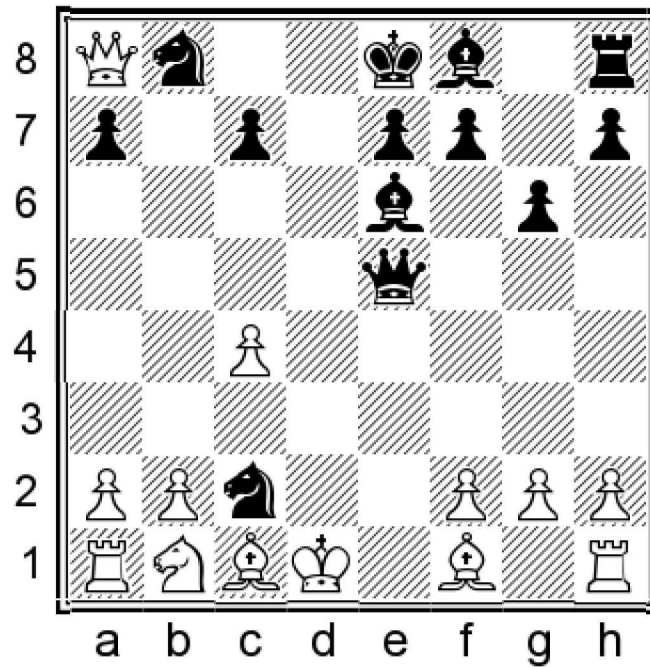
B) The materialistic 9...Nc2+?! was ventured in Van der Weide, K (2472) – Grunberg, M (2421) Triesen 2005, which continued 10.Kd1 Nxa1 11.Qxa8 Qd8 12.Be3 Bg7.



Position after: 12...Bg7

Now instead of the game continuation, 13.Bxa7, White should have preferred 13.Kc1² with at least a slight edge because the cornered knight is an issue. That being said, White isn't too happy with his king on c1 either and the position remains complicated enough for any result to happen.

9...Nc2+ 10.Ke2 Qxe5+ 11.Kd1



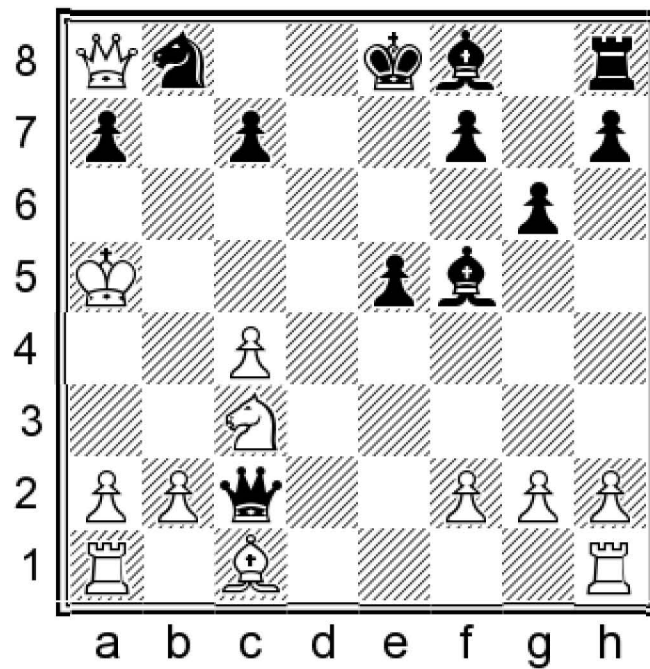
Position after: 11.Kd1

According to my database, the first appearance of this actual position took place in Trepp, M – Bischoff, K (2375) Sudlohn 1981, where Black now erred with 11...Qe1+??.

11...Qd4+

This improvement appeared in Nevednichy, V (2523) – Grunberg, M (2472) Paks 2007.

A) 11...Qe1+?? 12.Kxc2 Bf5+ 13.Bd3 Qe2+ 14.Kb3 Qxd3+ 15.Nc3 Qc2+ 16.Kb4 e5+ 17.Ka5



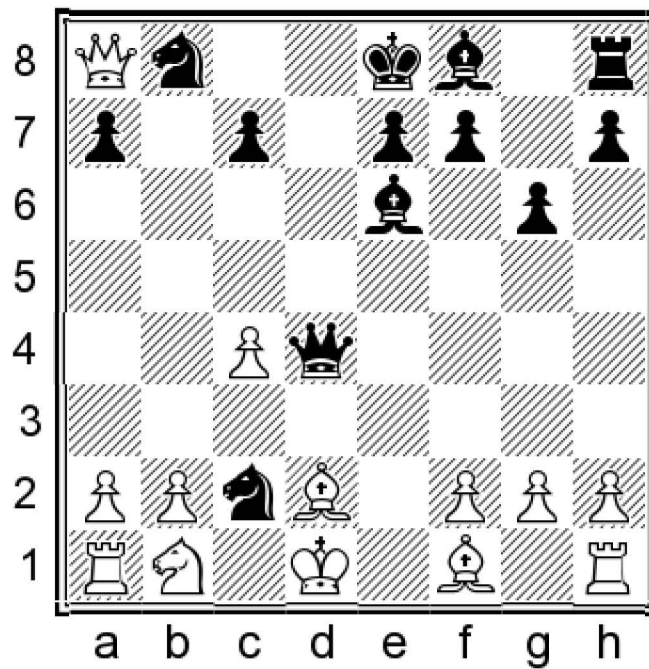
Position after: 17.Ka5

A picturesque position! For the moment White is up "only" an exchange but he is bound to win more material and Black doesn't have enough offensive units to bother the king on a5. 17...Bb4+ 18.Kxb4 0-0 19.Ka3+— ...but 0-1 (31)!

B) 11...Nxa1! seems the simplest way to proceed, when the machine claims White should take the perpetual check following 12.Qxb8+ Kd7 13.c5 Qxc5 14.Bb5+ c6 15.Qb7+ Kd8.

12.Nd2

White could also have tried 12.Bd2!?

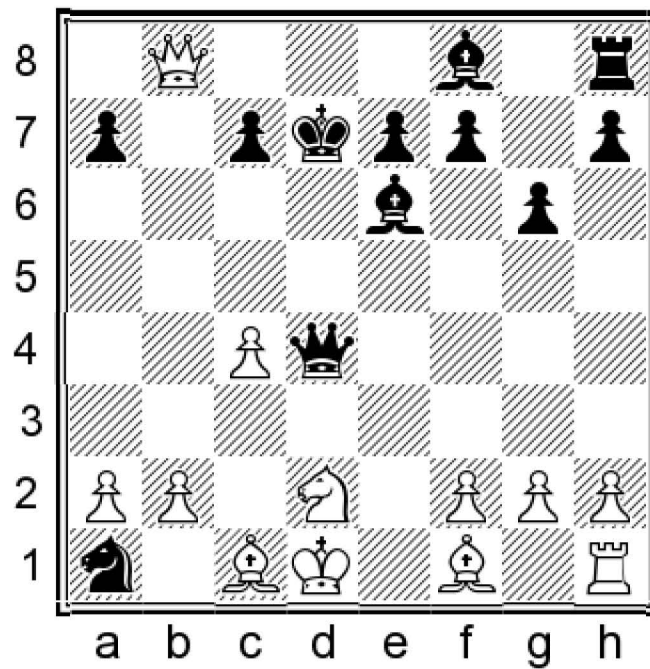


Position after: 12.Bd2!?

A) 12...Nxa1? is the only move C&K consider, and it leads to problems following 13.Qxb8+ Kd7 14.c5, as the two Russian authors rightly point out. After 12...Qxb2 the engine's assessment of 0.00 is funny, given the complexity of the position. One guesses the game should somehow end in a draw by repetition, but nothing obvious is in sight!

B) 12...Qxb2 13.Bc3 Bg4+ 14.f3 Ne3+ 15.Ke1 Nc2+ 16.Kf2 Qb6+ 17.Kg3 Bc8= And so on, as I will let you check.

12...Nxa1 13.Qxb8+ Kd7



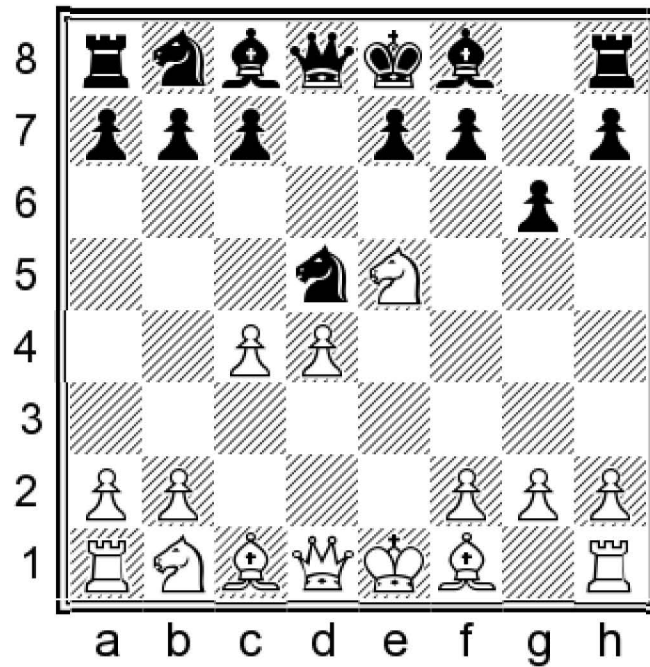
Position after: 13...Kd7

This position is equal and the above-mentioned duel soon ended peacefully by repetition of moves.

14.Qb5+ Kc8 15.Qe8+ Kb7 16.Qb5+ Kc8 17.Qe8+ Kb7 18.Qb5+=

m) 5...g6 6.c4 Nb6 7.Be3, 7.c5

1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.Nf3 dxe5 5.Nxe5 g6 6.c4



Position after: 6.c4

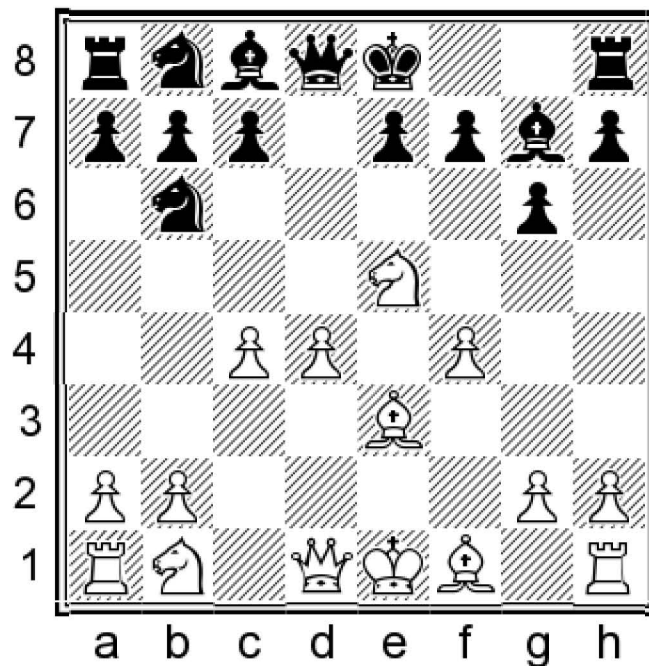
6...Nb6

6...Nf6 is less suitable because Black wouldn't apply pressure on the enemy c-pawn, and also because the knight reduces the scope of his dark-squared bishop.

7.c5

Gaining ground with this push isn't stupid at all, but Alekhine players would certainly welcome this choice with open arms. Both knight retreats are now acceptable.

7.Be3 Bg7 8.f4



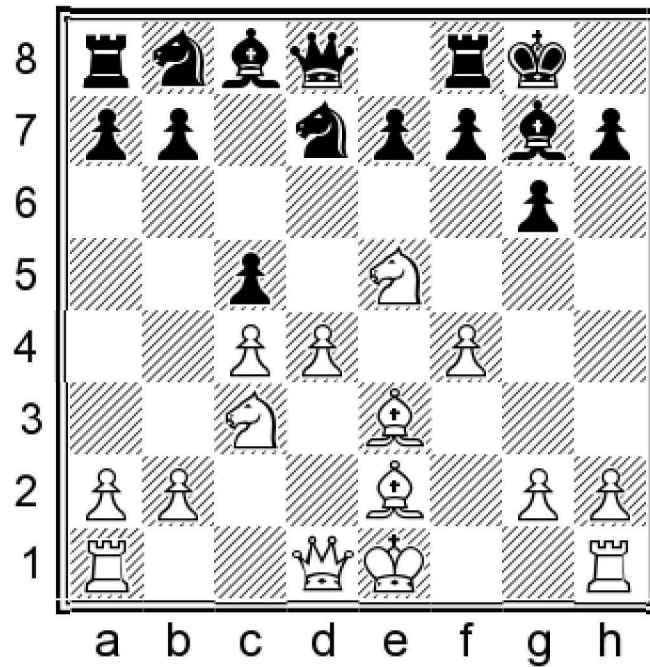
Position after: 8.f4

This position resembles the line 1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.c4 Nb6 5.f4 g6, with White answering a later...dxe5 capture with the odd Nxe5 instead of either fxe5 or dxe5. With 8.f4 White is bolstering his centralized knight, to which Black can respond by attacking the centre with ...c7-c5 or postponing that thematic push in favor of ...0-0.

A) 8...0-0

A1) 9.Nc3 c5 10.dxc5 N6d7 11.Nxd7 Bxd7 12.Be2 Nc6© Black isn't in a hurry to recover his invested pawn; he may continue with ...Be6 or ...Bf5, followed by either ...Nd4 or ...Qa5/...Rfd8. In general, when the powerful knight on e5 gets swapped White remains with weaknesses created by the f2-f4 thrust, while the black bishop at g7 becomes more powerful.

A2) 9.Be2 N6d7 [9...c5 is also adequate.] 10.Nc3 c5 This happened in Burovic, I (2295) – Zelic, R (2450) Bled 1993, where 11.Nxd7 would now have kept the balance.

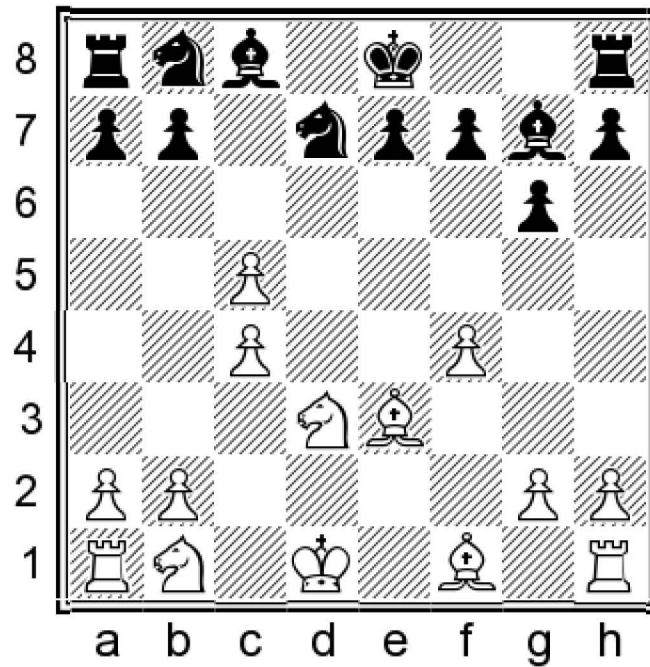


Position after: 10...c5

Instead 11.0-0? resulted in a worse endgame for White because of his isolated e-pawn following 11...cxd4 12.Bxd4 Nxe5 13.Bxe5 Bxe5 14.Qxd8 Rxd8 15.fxe5 Nc6³.

B) 8...c5

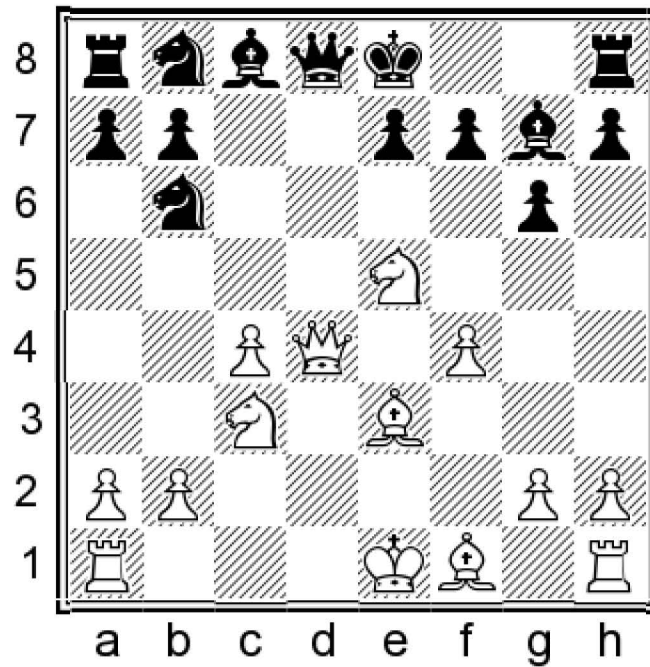
B1) 9.dxc5 from Aseev, K (2545) – Kengis, E (2500) Podolsk 1990, may be inferior due to 9...Qxd1+ 10.Kxd1 N6d7 11.Nd3



Position after: 11.Nd3

and now 11...Nf6! [the game continuation was 11...Na6 12.Nc3 0-0, when Black only gradually equalized. Interestingly, the engine suggests 12...Ndb8 here, with the obvious intention to redeploy the horse to c6 and play ...Bf5]. 12.Nc3 Nc6. Now Black has some chances to bother the enemy king by putting his light-squared bishop on f5 and a rook on d8.

B2) 9.Nc3 cxd4 10.Qxd4

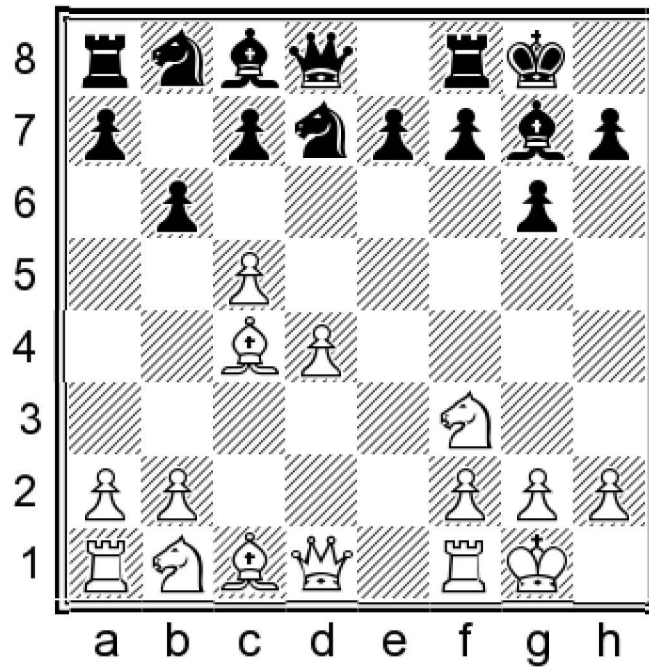


Position after: 10.Qxd4

Vitolinsh, A (2425) – Kengis, E (2465) Riga 1989. The game continued 10...Qxd4 11.Bxd4 N6d7 12.Nd5!². Since Black failed to equalize there, he should probably try his luck with either 10...N6d7 or 11...0-0.

7...Nd5

7...N6d7 8.Nf3 Bg7 9.Bc4 0-0 10.0-0 b6

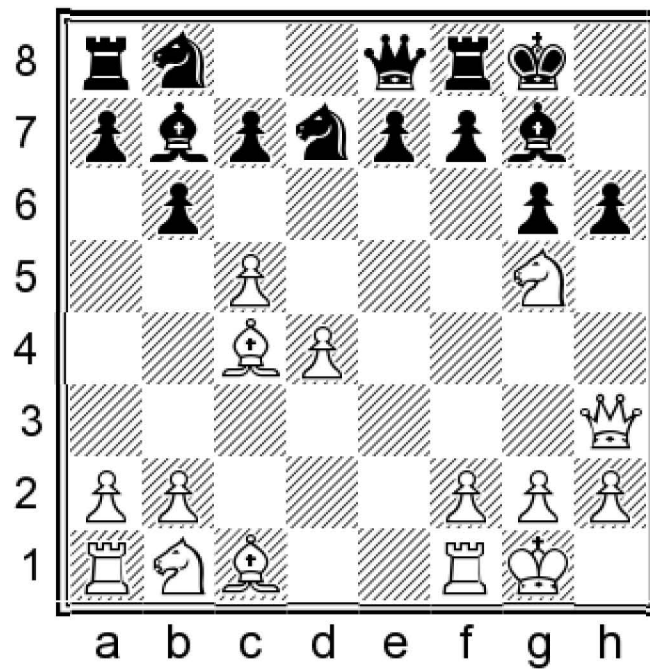


Position after: 10...b6

Probably not the only way to handle the position, but undermining the c-pawn at once is logical.

A) 11.Nc3!? This somewhat surprising pawn sacrifice seems to yield White an enduring pull and rather easy play, though Black naturally disposes of defensive resources to try and neutralize the pressure.
11...bxc5 12.dxc5 Nxc5 13.Qe2 c6 14.Be3 Nbd7 15.Rad1 Qc7∞ Haas, B (2302) – Jeute, V (2254) ICCF email 2013.

B) The more direct approach 11.Ng5 brought White success in Sax, G (2520) – Maus, S (2420) Germany 1994, but Black was fine out of the opening. 11...Bb7 12.Qb3 Qe8 [The computer suggests Black could also have allowed a sacrifice on either e6 or f7 with the cold-blooded 12...e6!?.] 13.Qh3 h6

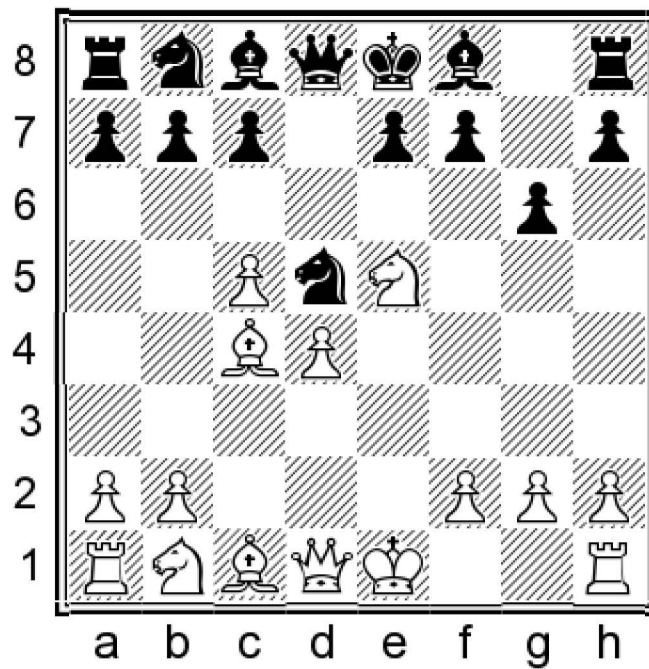


Position after: 13...h6

B1) 14.Nf3 h5∞ Not everything is ideal in Black's camp, but he won't be left without counterplay.

B2) 14.Nxf7 Rxf7 15.Bxh6 This is given as better for White by C&K, but I am not convinced because the position is just very chaotic. At any rate, rather than the only line they offer, 15...bxc5 16.dxc5 Bxb2? 17.Qb3!, my computer sees some approximate equality after 16...Bxh6 17.Qxh6 Ne5 or one move earlier 15...Nf6 16.Nc3 Nc6.

8.Bc4

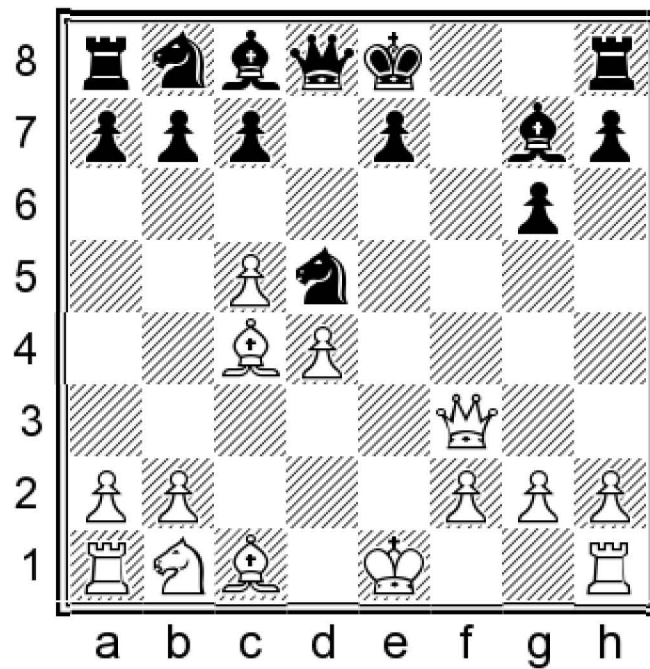


Position after: 8.Bc4

8...c6

8...Bg7 Since the coming obvious sacrifice doesn't give White more than equality, developing the bishop first should be a tad more precise than the cautious and more frequent 8...c6. Although it is more likely that Black could do without pushing his c-pawn than without ...Bg7 followed by ...0-0, the three moves are useful and play will probably transpose.

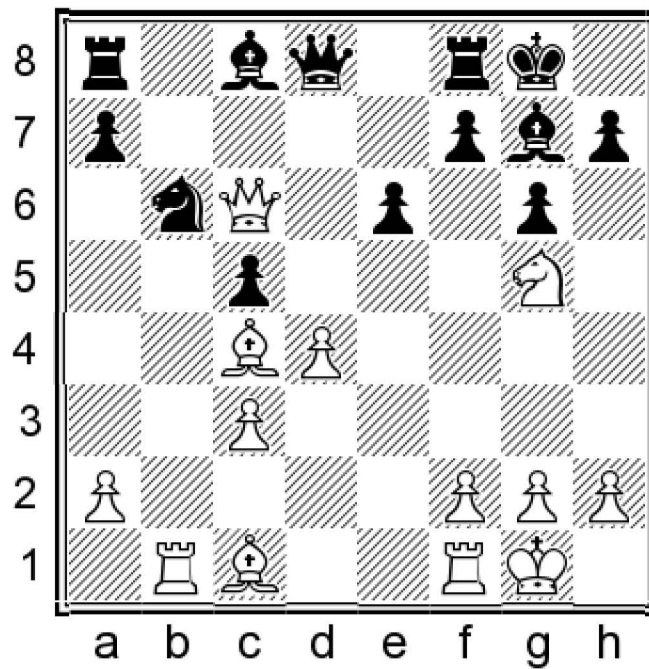
A) 9.Nxf7?! Kxf7 10.Qf3+ Ke8



Position after: 10...Ke8

and now both 11.Bxd5 Rf8 12.Qb3 c6 and 11.Qxd5 Qxd5 12.Bxd5 Bxd4 are roughly equal.

B) 9.Nf3 0-0 10.Nc3 Nxc3 11.bxc3 b6 12.0-0 bxc5 13.Ng5 c6 14.Qf3 e6 15.Rb1 [many other moves deserve attention, like 15.Qh3 h6 16.Ne4 e5∞] 15...Nd7! 16.Qxc6 Nb6

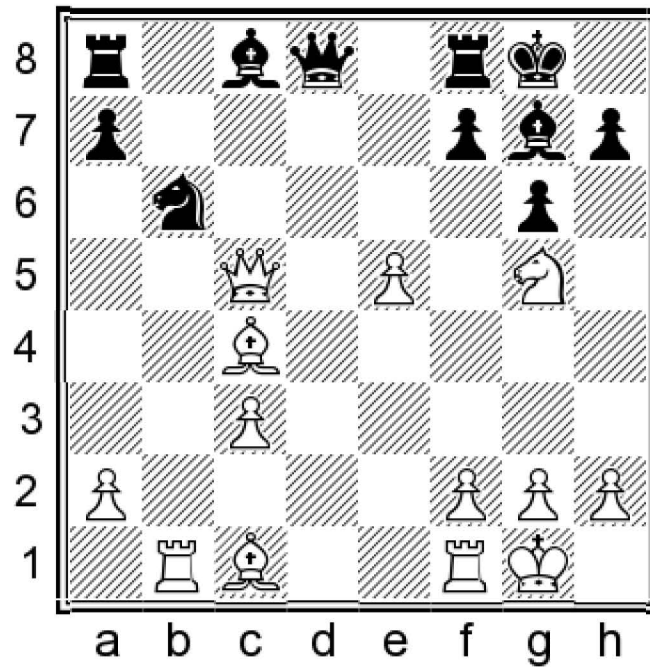


Position after: 16...Nb6

Black has given back his extra pawn and now even sacrifices one himself for the sake of completing his development.

B1) 17.Rxb6? was bad due to 17...Bd7 (18.Nxe6 Bxe6) with a clear edge for Black. Instead 17.dxc5 kept the equilibrium. 17...Bd7 18.Qe4 Nxc4 19.Qxc4 Bc6 20.Nxe6 Not forced but still OK: 20...Bd5 21.Nxd8 Bxc4 22.Nc6=. The machine judges that the knight and c5-pawn duo is worth an exchange after 22...Bxf1.

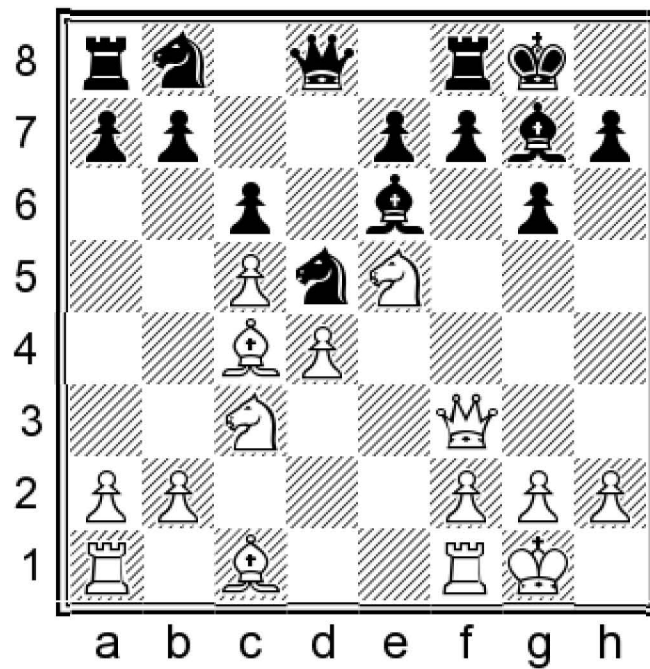
B2) 17.Qxc5 e5 [17...Nxc4!?!; 17...Bb7!?!] 18.dxe5



Position after: 18.dxe5

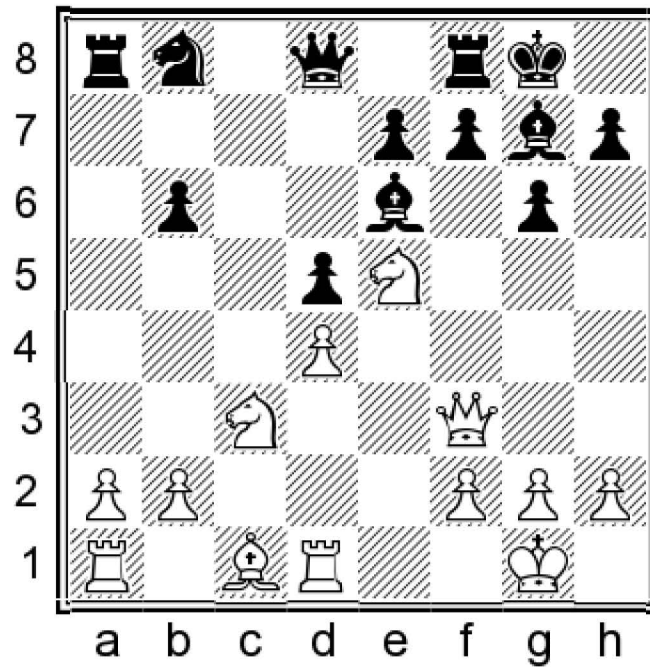
A draw was agreed here in Henri, S (2363) – Schmidt, L (2379) ICCF email 2014, presumably because of the following computeresque “equalizing” sequence: 18...Bf5 19.e6 Bxb1 20.e7∞.

C) 9.0-0 0-0 10.Nc3 Be6 11.Qf3 c6



Position after: 11...c6

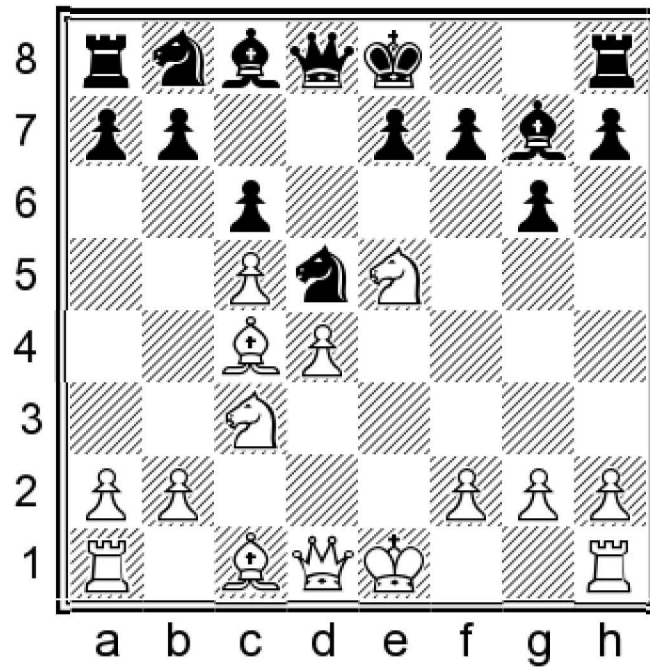
Black has ended up playing ...c7-c6 anyway, but had he done so earlier on, his opponent may have chosen a different setup. 12.Rd1 b6 [12...Nd7!?] 13.Bxd5 cxd5 14.cxb6 axb6



Position after: 14...axb6

Osorio, P (2199) – Kariz, P (2394) ICCF email 2006. Black holds long-term assets in the form of his bishop pair and a better pawn structure, but for the moment White's dynamism compensates for those factors.

9.Nc3 Bg7



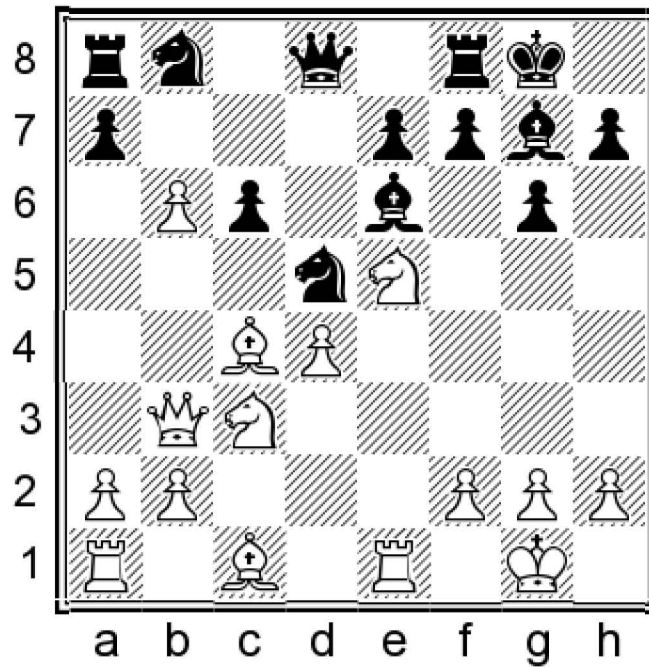
Position after: 9...Bg7

10.Qb3

This “mirror” queen-move, compared to Qf3, prevents the reply ...Bc8-e6 and puts some pressure on Black’s queenside. In that sense one may consider it more principled than its logical alternative.

A) For 10.Qf3 Be6 see 8...Bg7 9.0-0 0-0 and so on.

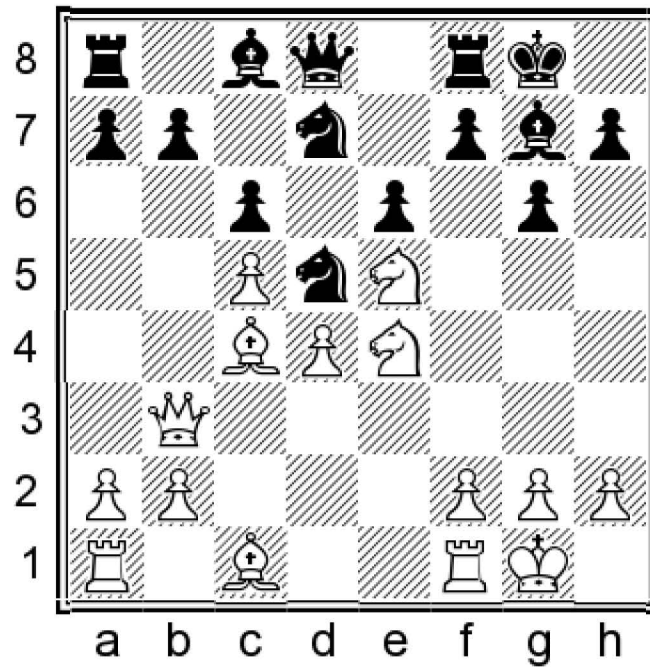
B) 10.0-0 0-0 11.Re1 Be6 Threatening 12...Bxe5 followed by 13...Nxc3 and finally 14...Bxc4. 12.Qb3 b6 [Or 12...Nd7 13.Bxd5 cxd5 14.Bf4, which the machine assesses as slightly in White’s favor as Black needs to answer questions regarding his b7- and d5-pawns.] 13.cxb6



Position after: 13.cxb6

13...Qxb6 [13...axb6² seems more appealing to me, but Black was probably attracted by the coming tactical sequence.] 14.Bg5 Qxd4 15.Qb7 Bxe5 16.Bxd5 Bxd5 [16...cxd5 wouldn't alter the evaluation.] 17.Nxd5 cxd5 [17...Qxd5 18.Qxa8 is also clearly better for White.] 18.Qxa8 e6 19.Rad1 Qa4 20.Qb7± His compact pawn structure didn't help Black, who eventually went down in Schneider, P (2307) – Bendig, F (2466) IECG email 2003.

10...e6 11.Ne4 0-0 12.0-0 Nd7



Position after: 12...Nd7

13.Nf3

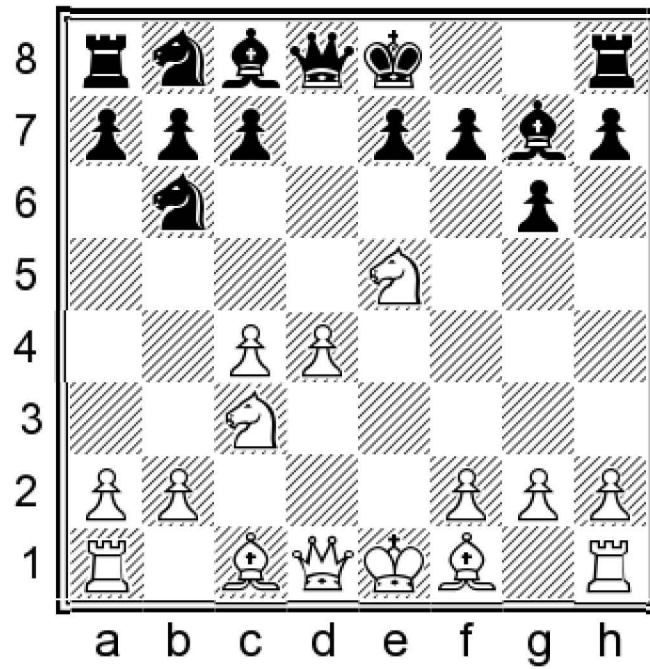
Perhaps 13.f4!? is more testing and in the spirit of the “bind” strategy White has adopted so far.

13...b6,,

With an unclear game: Cori Quispe, K (2487) – Valenzuela Gomez, F (2389) Gijon 2018.

n) 5...g6 6.c4 Nb6 7.Nc3

1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.Nf3 dxe5 5.Nxe5 g6 6.c4 Nb6 7.Nc3 Bg7

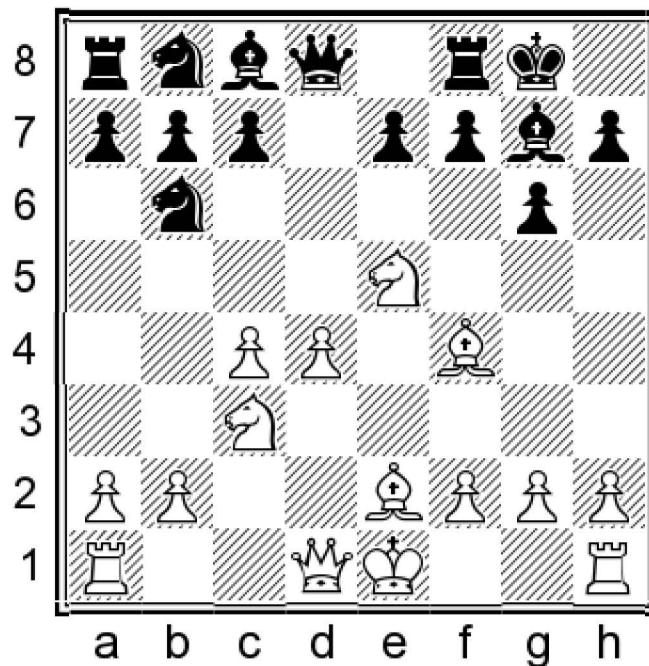


Position after: 7...Bg7

Again the usual undermining ...c7-c5 is imminent and if White is reluctant to push his c-pawn himself he has to take some prophylactic measure.

8.Be3

8.Bf4 0-0 9.Be2

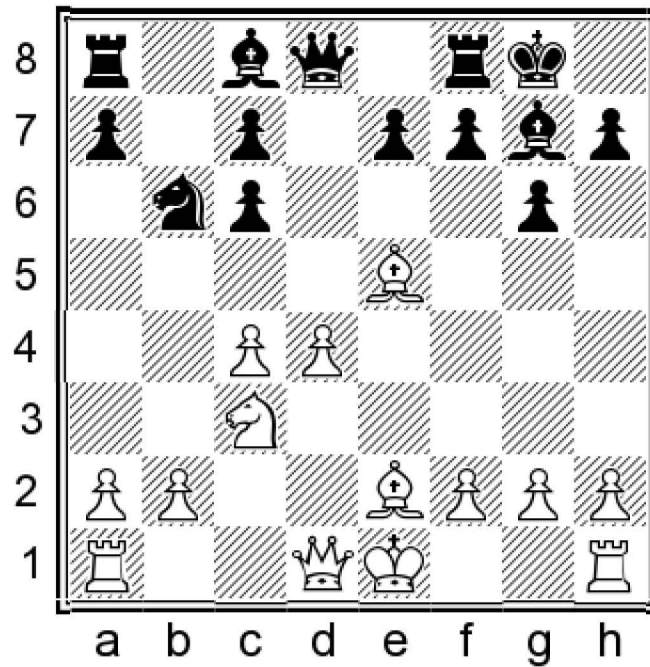


Position after: 9.Be2

A) 9...c6 10.0-0 Be6 11.b3 N8d7 12.Nf3 Bg4² King, D (2435) – Kengis, E (2430) Jurmala 1985. White has a space advantage but ...c6-c5 or ...Bxf3 Bxf3 ...e5 should give Black some play.

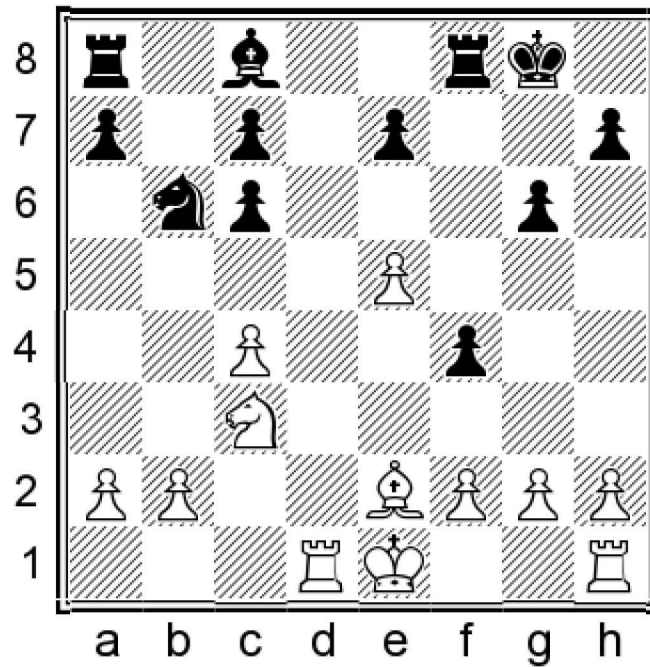
B) Black embarked upon the adventurous 9...f6 in Dvoirys, S (2310) – Kengis, E (2385) Tallinn 1981, but he failed to gain parity following 10.Nf3 g5 11.Be3 g4 12.Nd2 f5 13.c5 f4 14.cxb6 fxe3 15.fxe3 and White remained with an extra pawn.

C) 9...Nc6 leads to a slightly worse, albeit quite holdable, endgame and could be objectively Black's best: 10.Nxc6 bxc6 11.Be5



Position after: 11.Be5

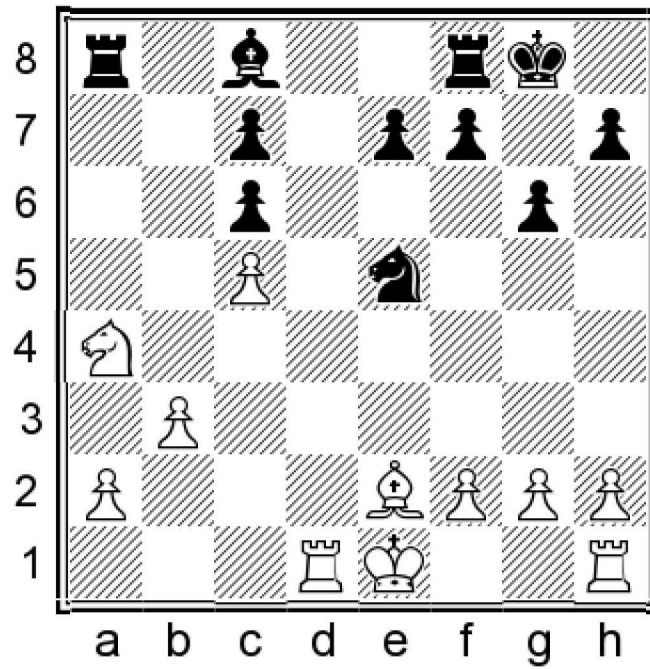
C1) 11...f6 was tried in Sadykov, R (2351) – Del Rio de Angelis, S (2517) Bilbao 2014, but pushing his f-pawn seems to harm Black more than anything else. 12.Bg3 f5 13.Be5 Bxe5 14.dxe5 Qxd1+ 15.Rxd1 f4 Black has achieved a version of the ending that derives from 11...Bxe5 where he may temporarily win the enemy e-pawn, but at the cost of permanent weaknesses.



Position after: 15...f4

At this stage, after the improvement 16.Bf3! Bb7 17.b3 Rf5 18.0-0 Rxe5 19.Ne2 or 19.Rfe1© White's compensation is more than sufficient.

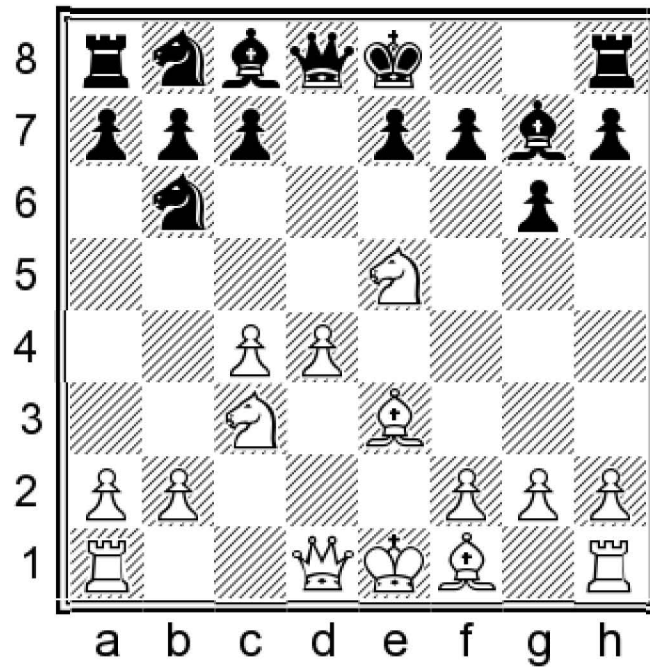
C2) 11...Bxe5 12.dxe5 Qxd1+ [12...a5!?] 13.Rxd1 a5 14.b3 a4 15.c5 Nd7 [15...Nd5!?] 16.Nxa4 Nxe5²/=



Position after: 16...Nxe5²

Szczepanski, Z (2461) – Van Seben, E (2426) LSS email 2011. Peace was agreed only seven moves later, which confirms my assertion attached to 9...Nc6.

Let's return to 8.Be3.

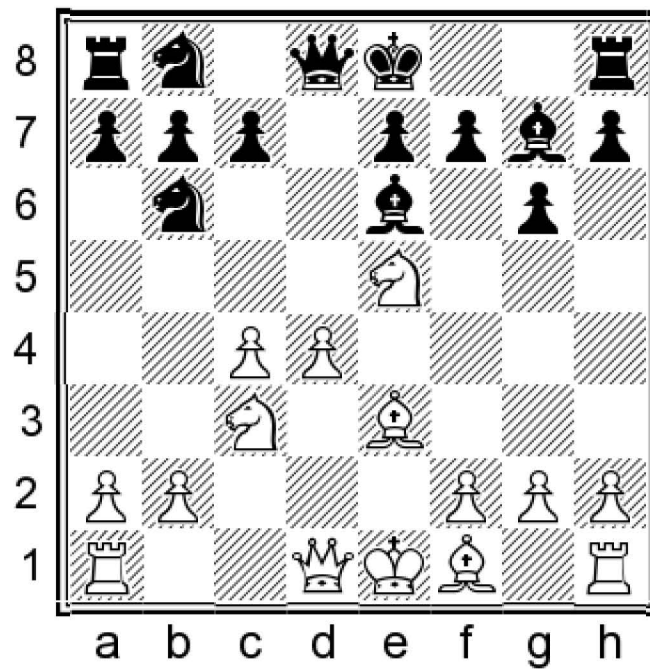


Position after: 8.Be3

8...0-0

As the strike ...c7-c5 isn't that urgent, I would label the flexible 8...0-0 as the main line.

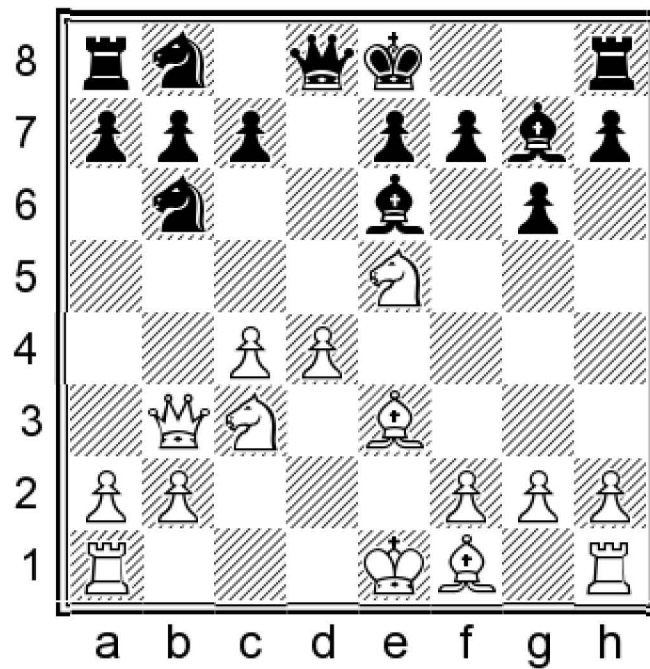
A) 8...Be6 This provocative move, which also exists in the four-pawns variation, doesn't seem to equalize fully. White should now decide on how to meet the threat of ...Bxe5 dxe5 ...Qxd1+ followed by taking on c4.



Position after: 8...Be6

A1) 9.f4 c6?! [I am not fond of this overly solid move, which reduces Black's options compared to 9...0-0.] 10.b3 White enjoyed a stable edge in Vitolinsh, A (2415) – Kengis, E (2470) Soviet Union 1988.

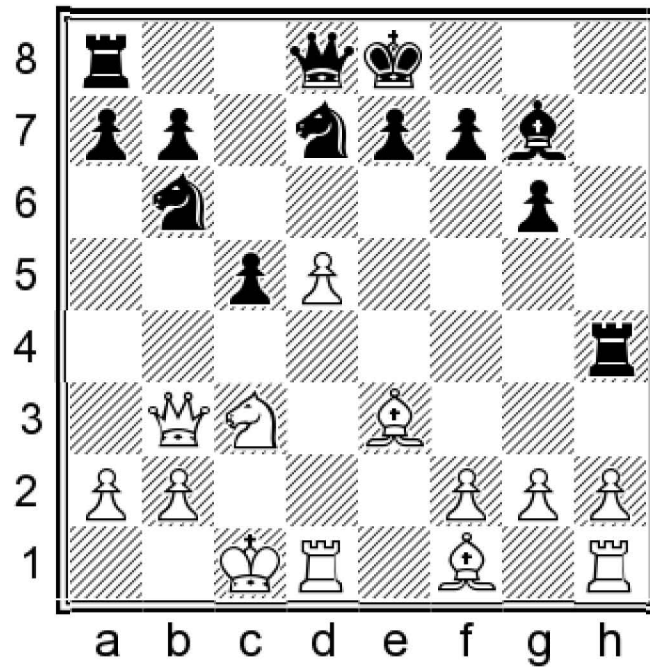
A2) 9.Qb3



Position after: 9.Qb3

A2.1) Immediate action can again be postponed, even if after 9...0-0 10.Rd1 Black would first need to remove his queen from the d-file. 10...Qc8 11.Nf3 a5 12.a4 Na6² Black is ready to jump ...Nb4 and reply either ...Bf5 or ...Bg4 if his opponent advances d4-d5, see 8...0-0 9.Qb3 for more details.

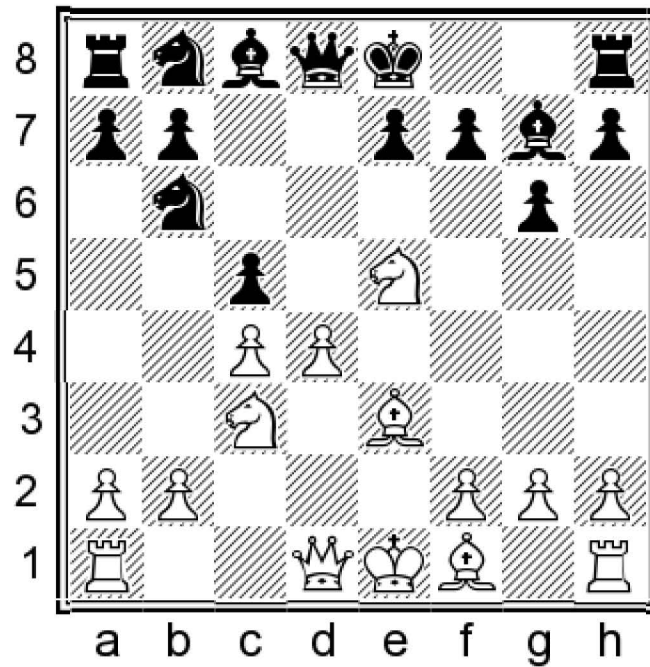
A2.2) 9...c5 10.d5 [Or 10.dxc5 Bxe5 11.cxb6 axb6 and now the machine suggests giving priority to the developing move 12.Be2² rather than rush with 12.Bxb6!?.] 10...Bxd5 11.Nxg6 hxg6 12.cxd5 N8d7 13.0-0-0 Rh4²



Position after: 13...Rh4²

Black wasn't rewarded for his creative play in Tucci, A (2437) – Rezzuti, V (2391) ICCF email 2015, but in a practical game any outcome seems possible to me here. Black's ideas include ...Rb4 (which White actually stopped with 14.a3 in that particular game), ...c5-c4, and ...Rc8 followed by putting a piece on d4.

B) Or again 8...c5 when White has available a wide range of possibilities.

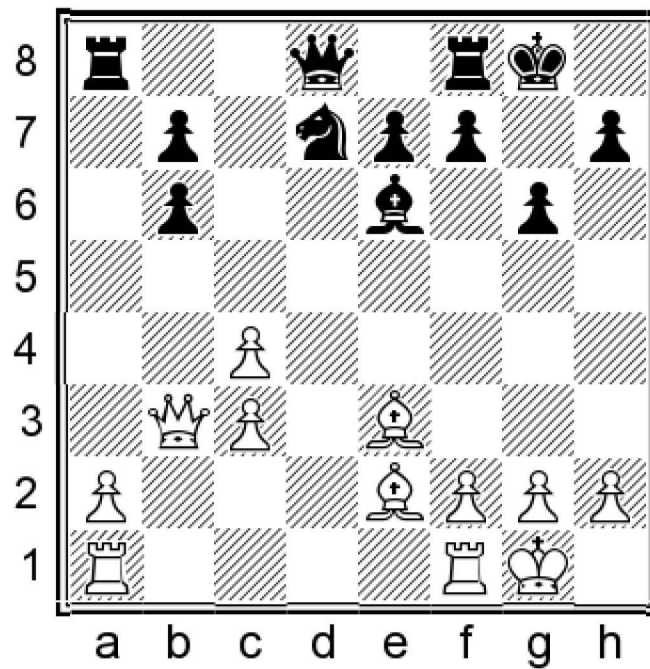


Position after: 8...c5

Here are some of them.

B1) 9.Be2 0-0 10.0-0 Be6 [10...cxd4 11.Bxd4 Be6 12.b3 This looks a tad better for White but Black should slowly, slowly equalize provided he shows some care.]

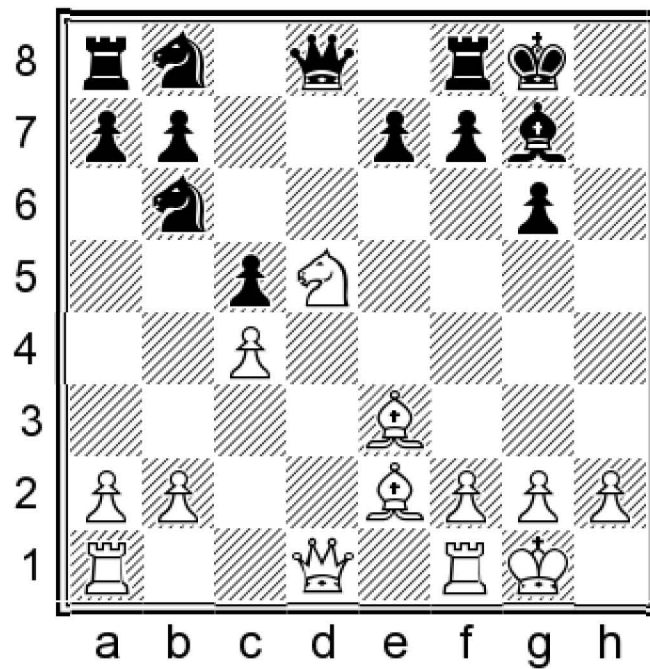
B1.1) 11.dxc5 Bxe5 12.cxb6 Bxc3 13.bxc3 axb6 14.Qb3 Nd7 Staroske, U (2332) – Belanoff, S (2278) LSS email 2010.



Position after: 14...Nd7

This looks decent for Black and was indeed agreed drawn some nine moves later. Black shouldn't worry too much about the departure of his dark-squared bishop, and he has obvious counterplay against the white queenside pawns.

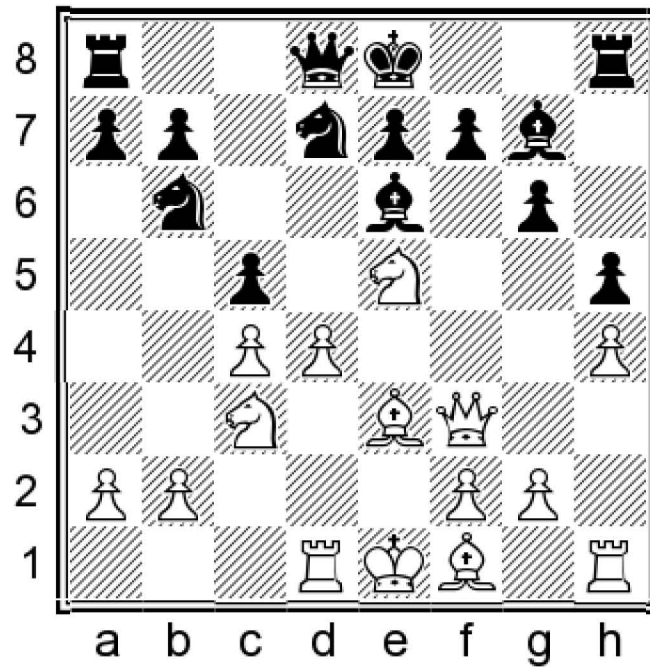
B1.2) 11.d5 Bxd5 12.Nxg6 hxg6 13.Nxd5



Position after: 13.Nxd5

13...Bxb2 Other moves make sense too, of course. 14.Rb1 Bd4 15.Bxd4 cxd4 16.Qxd4 Nc6 17.Qb2² Kermer, W (2324) – Pavlov, V (2427) ICCF email 2017.

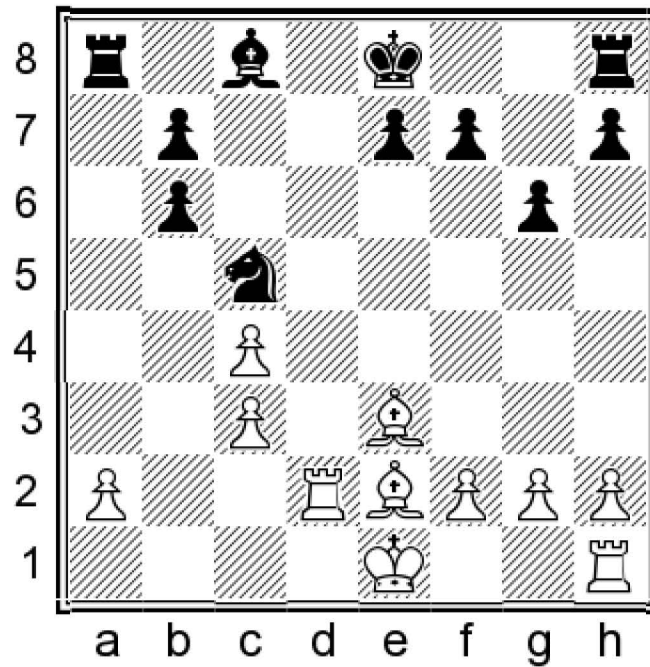
B2) 9.h4!? Quite funny since usually a flank action calls for a central reaction, whereas we see the opposite here! 9...h5 [The alternative 9...cxd4 looks quite sensible to me but White may claim a slight plus following 10.Bxd4 f6 11.Nf3 Nc6 12.Be3².] 10.Qf3 Be6 [Or 10...0-0 11.0-0-0[∞] with a wild game.] 11.Rd1 N8d7



Position after: 11...N8d7

We have followed Rudenko, A (2350) – Rezzuti, V (2396) ICCF email 2015, where in place of 12.Nxd7 Nxd7= White had two more promising options, namely 12.Nxf7 Bxf7 13.dxc5 ∞ and 12.Qxb7 Nxe5 13.dxe5 Qc8, and now 14.Qxc8+ Rxc8 15.b3 Bxe5 should be ² due to White's sounder pawn structure.

B3) 9.dxc5 Qxd1+ 10.Rxd1 Bxe5 11.cxb6 Bxc3+ 12.bxc3 axb6 13.Rd2 Nd7 14.Be2 Nc5

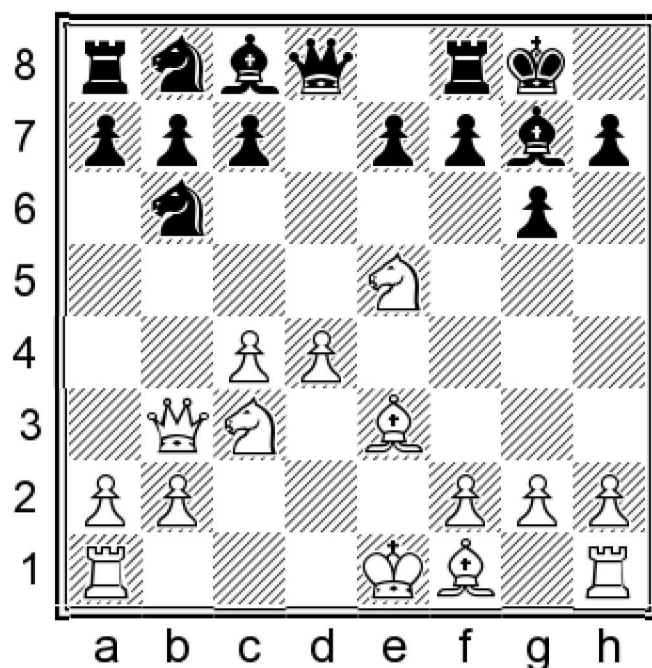


Position after: 14...Nc5

Siigur, J (2430) – De Coninck, G (2390) ICCF email 2000. See the note to 9.Be2 0-0 10.0-0 Be6 11.dxc5 and so on.

9.Be2

9.Qb3 is playable but in my opinion less logical than completing development.

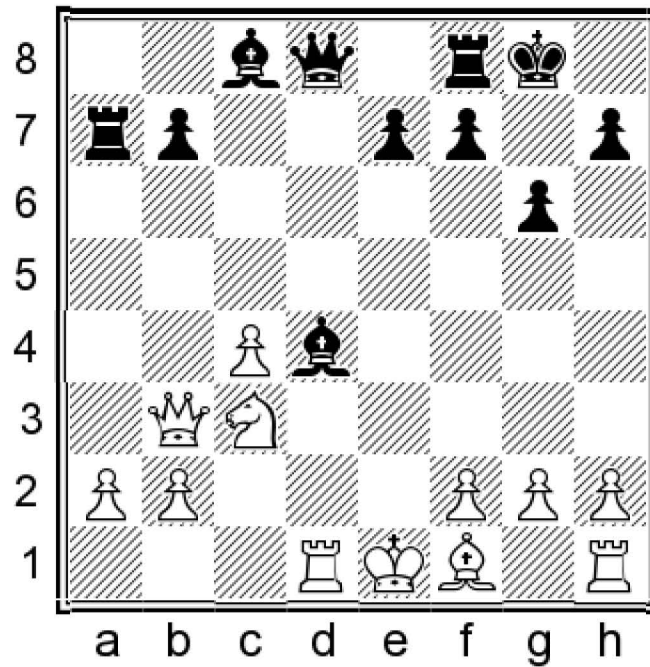


Position after: 9.Qb3

One may, however, argue that c4-c5 and 0-0-0 become worthy options after the queen's sortie.

A) 9...a5 10.0-0-0 Nc6 11.h4 a4 12.Qa3 h5∞ This quite sharp position arose in Lowrance, W (2537) – Rada, H (2508) FICGS email 2010.

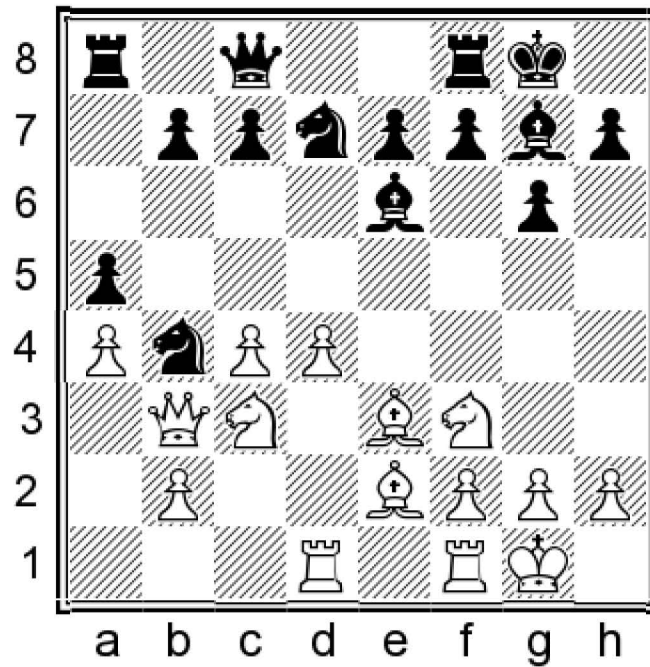
B) The typical counter 9...c5!?, which often involves a pawn sacrifice, looks acceptable too. For instance, 10.dxc5 Bxe5 11.cxb6 Nc6 12.bxa7 Nd4 13.Bxd4 Bxd4 14.Rd1 Rxa7©. Black had ...e7-e5 to follow and compensation on the dark squares in Galliano, G (2332) – Schmidt, L (2389) ICCF email 2014.



Position after: 14...Rxa7©

The materialistic 15.Nb5? would now be misguided in view of 15...Qa5+ 16.Ke2 [16.Rd2?! Bxf2+ is even worse] 16...e5 17.Nxa7 Qxa7 when Black has more than enough compensation for the sacrificed exchange and pawn.

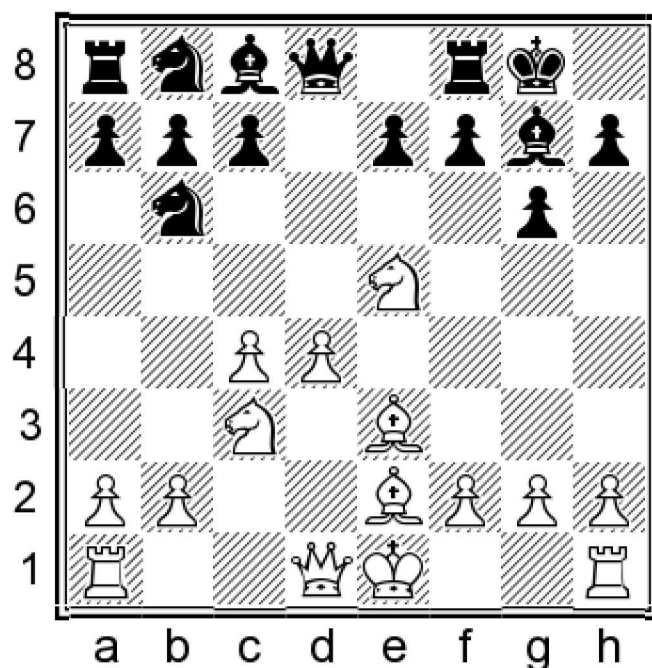
C) 9...Be6 10.Rd1 Qc8 11.Nf3 a5 12.a4 Na6 13.Be2 Nb4 14.0-0 Nd7



Position after: 14...Nd7

Two correspondence games reached this position and now took different paths. In Ingersol, H (2404) – Nettelbeck, J (2339) ICCF email 2011, White decided to get rid of the intruder by means of 15.Na2 while Sgherri, M (2329) – Schmidt, L (2389) ICCF email 2014, saw 15.Rd2 Nf6 and so on, each time with a rich middlegame offering reciprocal chances.

Back to 9.Be2.



Position after: 9.Be2

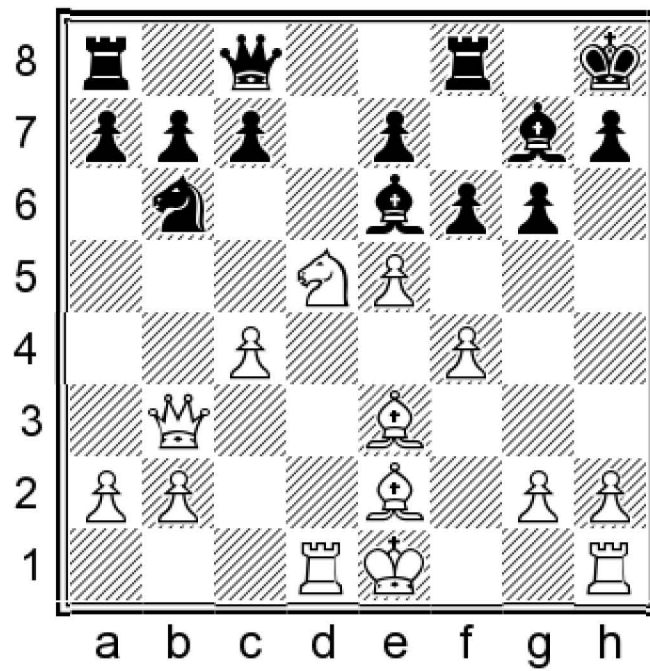
9...Be6

A) 9...c5 will likely transpose into a line seen under 8...c5.

B) I don't fancy 9...N8d7?!, especially since besides 10.c5 the alternatives 10.Nf3 and 10.f4 also look promising for White. 10...Nxe5 11.dxe5 Nd7 12.f4 c6 13.0-0 b6 14.Ne4 Cardelli, G (2554) – Spooner, M (2308) ICCF email 2001. White emerged from the opening with a pleasant edge.

10.Qb3 Nc6!?

This creative treatment, in comparison with the standard ...c7-c5 and ...a7-a5 examined under another move order, occurred in Goncharov, I (2399) – Schmidt, L (2306) ICCF email 2013, which continued 11.Rd1 Nxe5 12.dxe5 Qc8 13.f4 f6 14.Nd5 Kh8,,

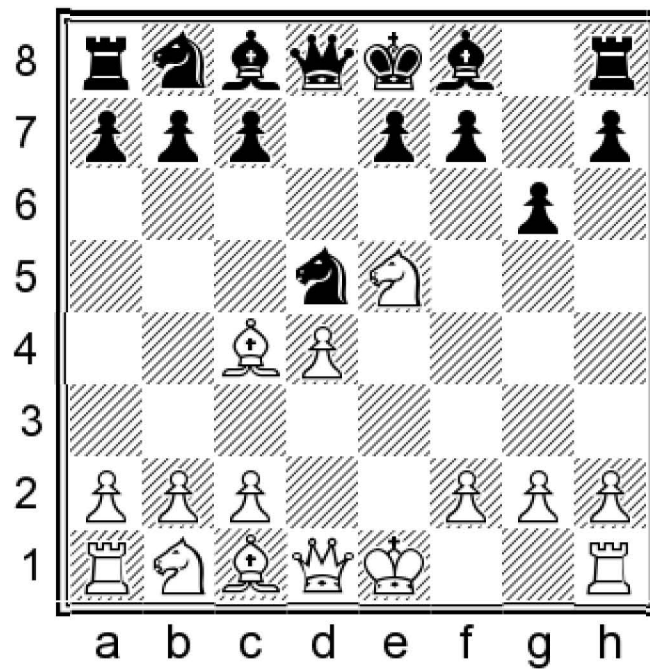


Position after: 14...Kh8

Black had sufficient counterplay.

o) 5...g6 6.Bc4

1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.Nf3 dxe5 5.Nxe5 g6 6.Bc4



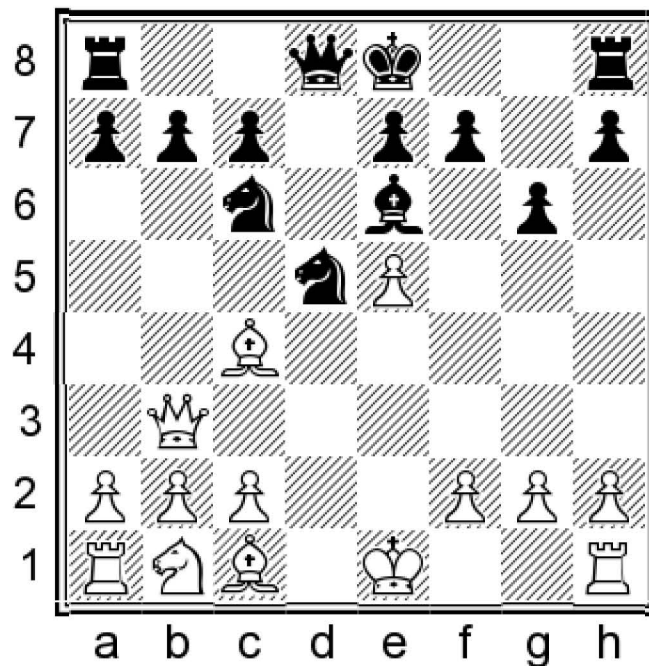
Position after: 6.Bc4

6...Be6

A) 6...Bg7?!

A1) 7.Qf3 Be6

A1.1) White got harshly punished for his unjustified 8.Qb3? in Nepomniachtchi, I (2784) – Xiong, J (2709) lichess.org 2020, which continued 8...Bxe5 [8...Nc6! 9.Nxc6 bxc6³ was even a bit better] 9.dxe5 Nc6.

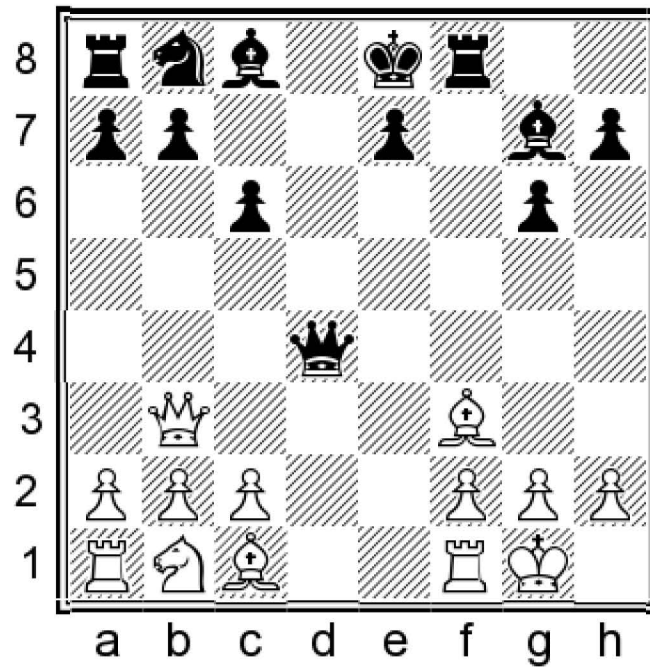


Position after: 9...Nc6

10.Qxb7?? A suicidal pawn-grab. [10.0-0 would have kept the balance.]
 10...Ndb4—+ Black was already winning and the talented American junior brought home the point 11 moves later.

A1.2) 8.0-0 0-0 9.Re1 c6 10.c3 Nd7 11.Nxd7 Qxd7 12.Nd2 Nc7 13.Bb3 Rfe8 14.Ne4 Bd5 was approximately equal in Obolenskikh, D (2544) – Wagner, D (2581) chess.com (rapid) 2020.

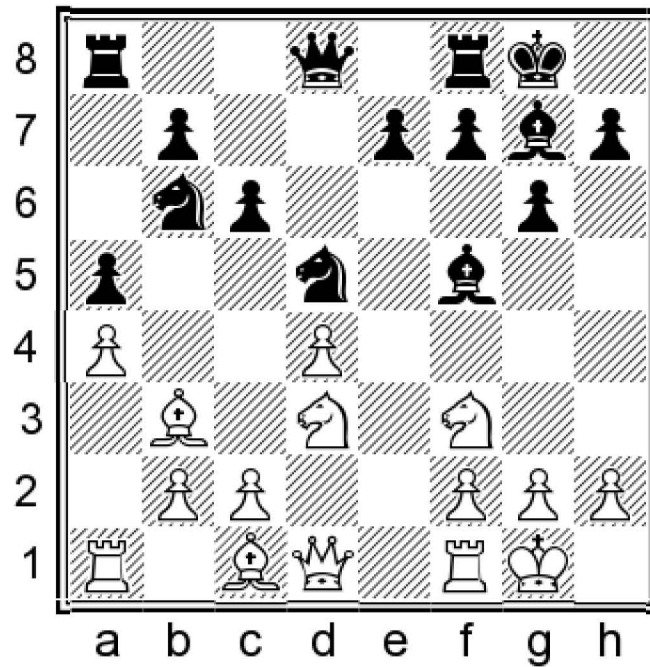
A2) We have discussed the pseudo-sacrifice 7.Nxf7! with the insertion of 6.c4 Nb6 7.c5 Nd5. The current version is better for White, because his c-pawn won't hang at the end. 7...Kxf7 8.Qf3+ Ke8 9.Bxd5 Rf8 10.Qb3 c6 11.Bf3 Qxd4 12.0-0



Position after: 12.0-0

Ramesh, R (2443) – Mishra, M (2216) Jalandhar (rapid) 2000. White has a clear advantage based on his healthier pawn structure and safer king, a conclusion already stressed by Chetverik and Kalinichenko who warn the reader against 6...Bg7?!.

B) The move 6...c6 is fine in itself but cuts off the option of playing ...c7-c5 in one go. For example: 7.0-0 Bg7 8.Nd2 0-0 9.Ndf3 Nd7 10.Nd3 a5 11.a4 N7b6 12.Bb3 Bf5

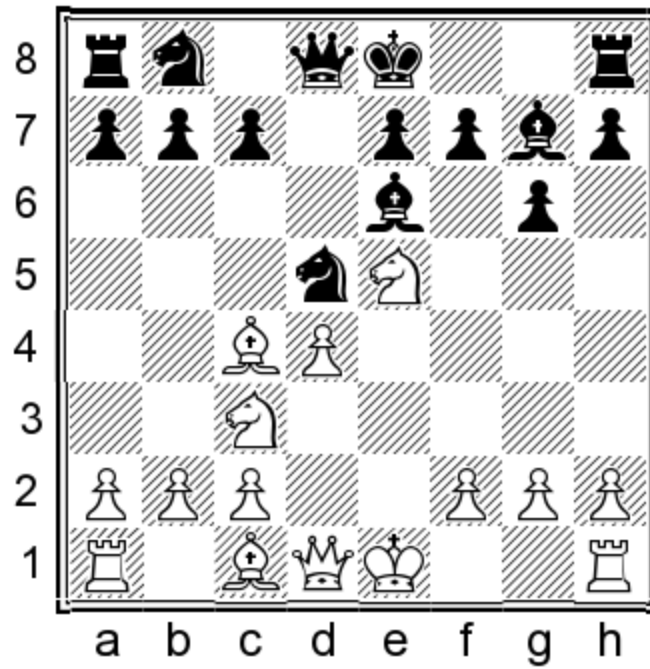


Position after: 12...Bf5

with a solid game for both sides, Arnason, J (2555) – Kengis, E (2475)
Jurmala 1987.

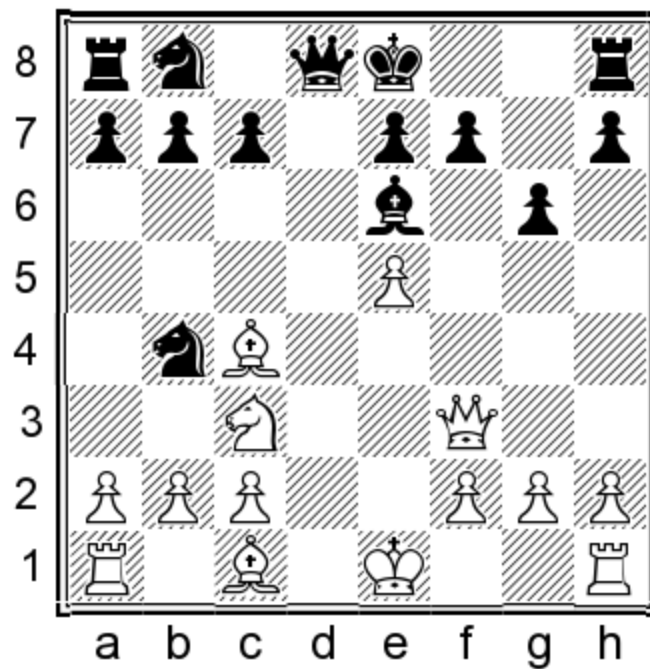
7.0-0

7.Nc3 Bg7 [7...Nxc3? would be a gross mistake due to the intermediate capture 8.Bxe6! fxe6 9.bxc3±.]



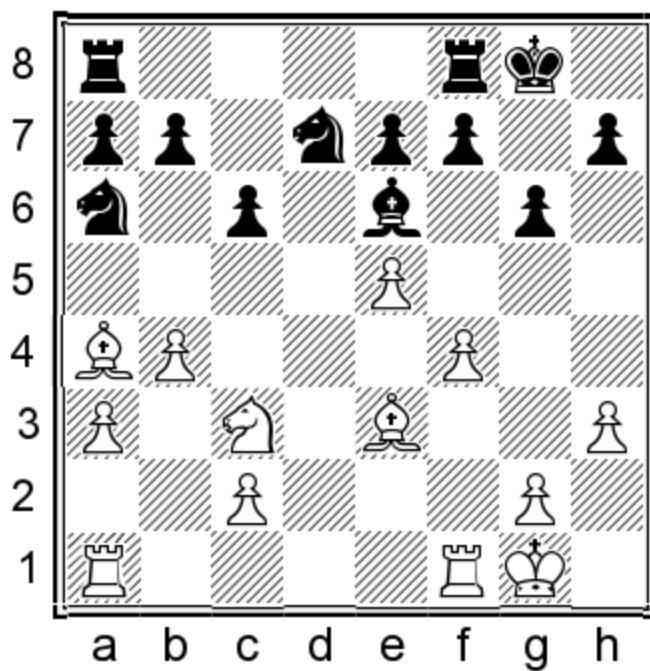
Position after: 7...Bg7

A) 8.Qf3 Bxe5!? is surprisingly, to me at least, a quite decent alternative as the following variations show. [8...c6!?] 9.dxe5 Nb4



Position after: 9...Nb4

10.Bb5+ C&K skip this move. [It may be a small refinement over their line 10.Bxe6 Nxc2+ 11.Kf1 fxe6 12.Qxb7 Nd7 13.Rb1∞ Maros, M (2245) – Horvath, M (2195) Martin 1996.] 10...c6 11.Ba4 This happened in Raaste, E (2370) – Westerinen, H (2390) Pori 1986, which continued 11...Qd4 12.0-0 Nd7 13.Be3 Qg4 14.Qxg4 Bxg4 15.a3 Na6 16.h3 Be6 17.b4 0-0 18.f4.

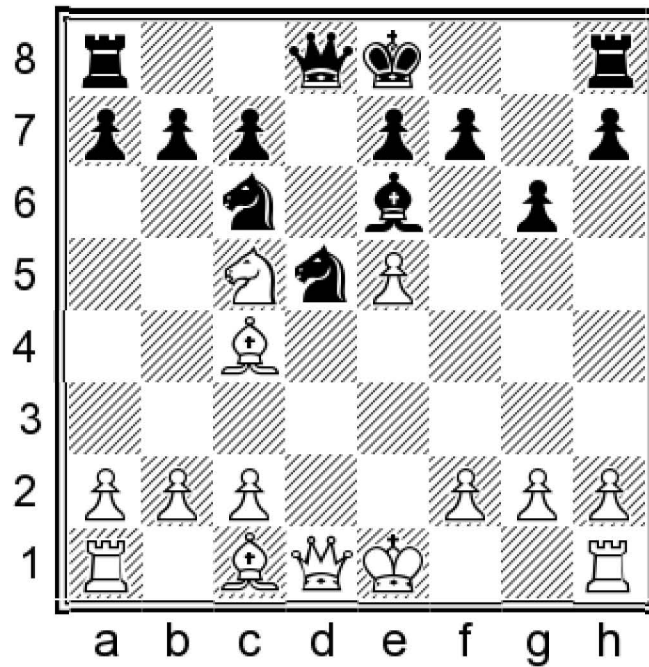


Position after: 18.f4

Peace was signed at this point. There is obviously room for improvements, for both sides, over the last half-dozen moves.

B) 8.Ne4

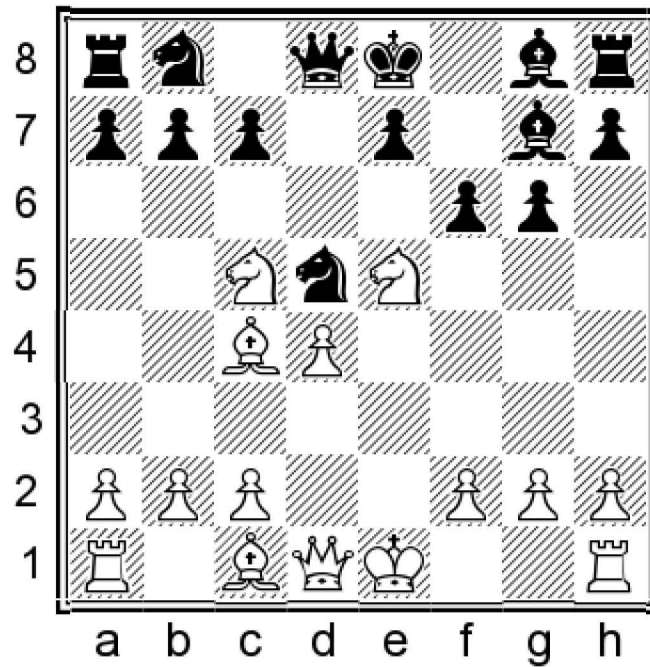
B1) 8...Bxe5 Black's most popular choice, which seems sufficient to gain him rough equality. 9.dxe5 Nc6 10.Nc5



Position after: 10.Nc5

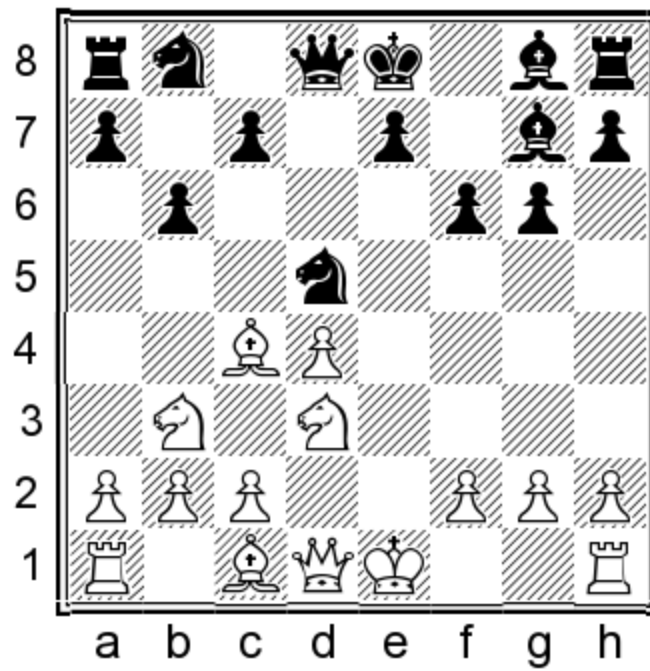
10...Nf4 [At this juncture Black should avoid 10...Ne3?! 11.Bxe3 Bxc4 12.b3 b6 13.bxc4 bxc5 14.Qf3! but rather choose from one of the following two moves.; 10...Nxe5 11.Nxb7 Qd7 12.Nc5 Qc6 13.Nxe6 fxe6 Black's activity counterbalances his wrecked structure.] 11.Bxf4 Bxc4 12.b3 b6 [Or first 12...Qxd1+ 13.Rxd1 and only then 13...b6.] That last option gives Black a favorable version of the similar 10...Ne3?!.]

B2) If Black is looking for a less trodden path, then 8...f6!? from Godena, M (2537) – Motylev, A (2676) Budva 2009 is available, albeit not without risk. 9.Nc5 Bg8



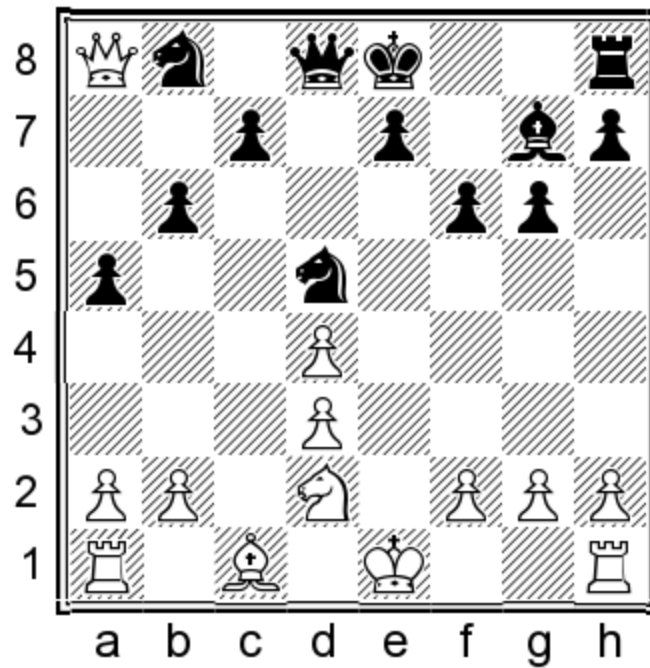
Position after: 9...Bg8

Quite an atypical position after nine moves! The justification of Black's weird strategy will soon become apparent: 10.Ned3 b6 11.Nb3 or 11.Ne4 Nc3 12.Nxc3 Bxc4 ∞ . The black bishops represent a long-term asset even if for the moment the one at g7 looks a bit dumb.



Position after: 11.Nb3

B2.1) 11...Nc3?! 12.Qf3! Bxc4 13.Qxa8 Nd5 14.Nd2 Bxd3 15.cxd3 a5

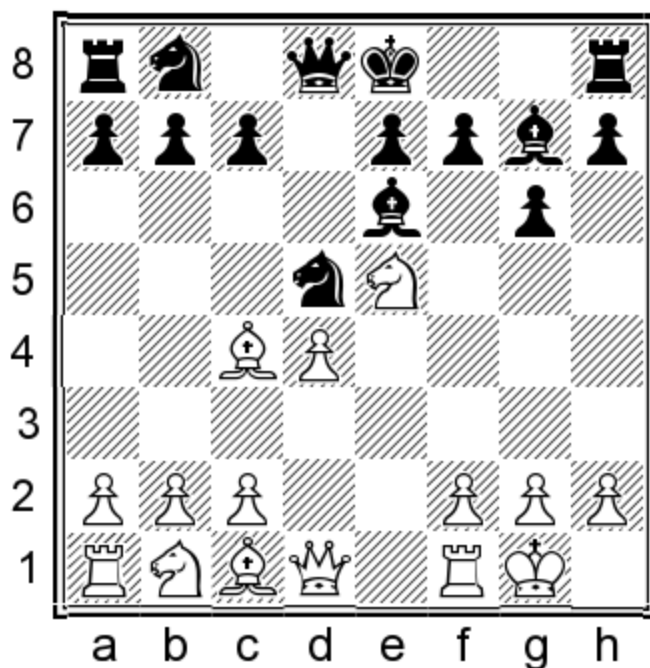


Position after: 15...a5

Now C&K correctly mention that 16.Nf3 c6 17.Bd2 0-0 18.Rb1 followed by b2-b4 would have rescued the white queen and preserved a sizeable edge.

B2.2) Analysis showed that the exchange sacrifice above wasn't fully sound, so the other jump, 11...Ne3, was objectively better: 12.Bb5+ c6 13.Bxc6+ Nxc6 14.fxe3 [or 14.Bxe3] 14...Bf7©.

7...Bg7



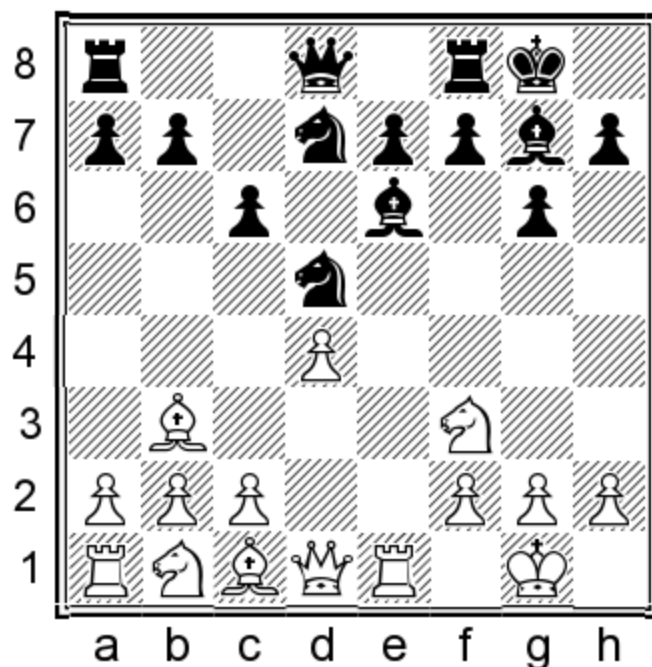
Position after: 7...Bg7

8.Re1

8.Qe2 happened in the old game Matanovic, A (2505) – Knezevic, M (2500) Vrsac 1977. While that move is reasonable, it's nice to threaten Re1xe6 in some lines, as we will see.

8...0-0 9.Nd2

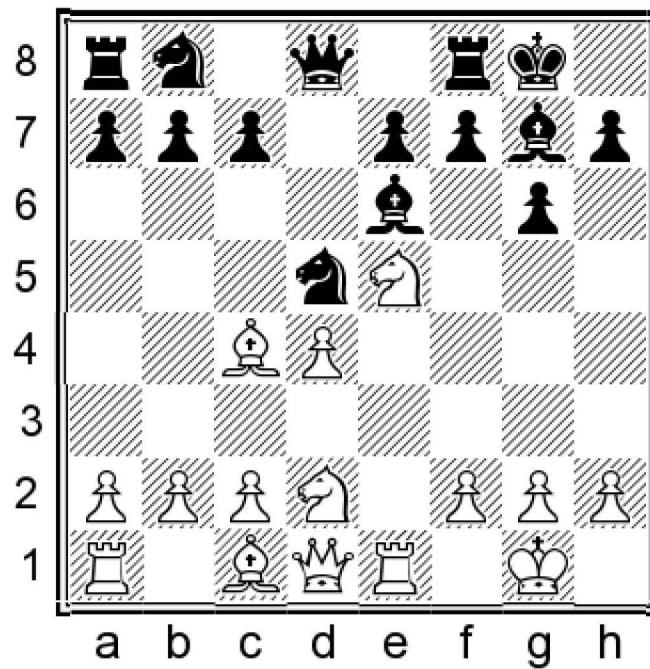
9.Bb3 from Mamedov, R (2654) – Carlsen, M (2863) lichess.org (blitz) 2020 might be a trifle less accurate. Indeed, in the event of a subsequent exchange sacrifice, as in that game, White would prefer having his queen's knight already developed. 9...Nd7 10.Nf3 c6



Position after: 10...c6

11.Rxe6 fxe6 12.Qe2?! [White should have preferred either 12.Ng5 or 12.Nc3 with nice compensation.] 12...e5! 13.dxe5 Nc5 [13...e6!] 14.Nbd2? [14.Nc3 was still acceptable for White.] 14...Nxb3 15.axb3 Nf4μ Black was now in the driver's seat and the World Champion duly converted his marked advantage.

Back to 9.Nd2.

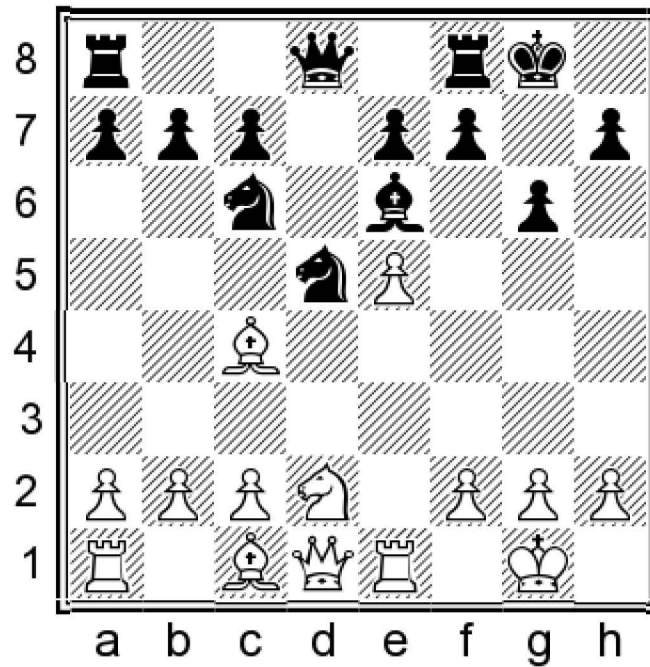


Position after: 9.Nd2

9...Nd7

A) 9...c6 This move order is perhaps the more circumspect, although the game may transpose into 9...Nd7 (and you can see there how the game could develop). Black is intending to go ...Nd7 and/or ...Nc7 next and he would like to trade one or two set(s) of pieces to ease his game. He cannot claim full equality here but his position is rock-solid.

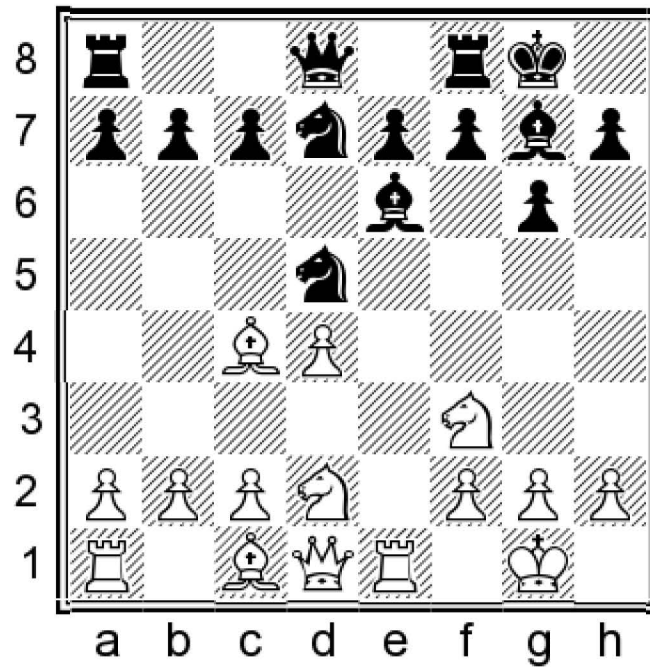
B) 9...Bxe5 looks a bit suspicious on principle but isn't plainly bad.
10.dxe5 [10.Rxe5 Nc6 11.Rxe6 fxe6 12.Nf3©] 10...Nc6



Position after: 10...Nc6

And now 11.c3² Nf4 12.Qf3! rather than 11.Ne4 as in Zakhariev, Z (2310) – Donev, I (2350) Elenite 1986, where in place of 11...Ne3?! Black should have played 11...Ndb4!=.

10.Nef3



Position after: 10.Nef3

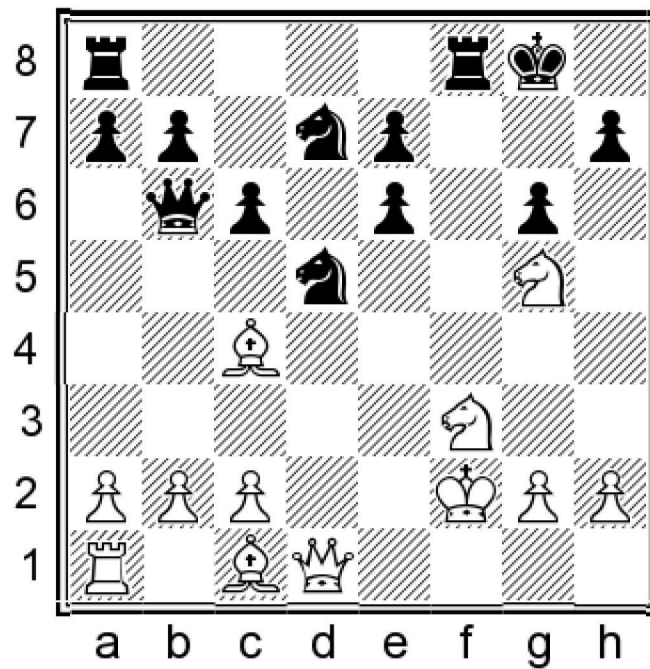
10...N7b6

This move rules out the exchange sacrifice on e6 altogether. That sacrifice is in my view promising after 10...c6 and simply strong in the event of 10...N7f6?!.

A) 10...N7f6?! 11.Rxe6! fxe6 12.Ng5 Qd6 13.Qe1 Grischuk, A – Riazantsev, A Moscow 2009. Black faces a tough defensive task.

B) 10...c6

B1) 11.Rxe6!? fxe6 12.Ng5 Bxd4 13.Ndf3 Bxf2+ Otherwise White will just restore the material balance by taking on e6 and then f8, with a neat positional edge. 14.Kxf2 Qb6+∞/2

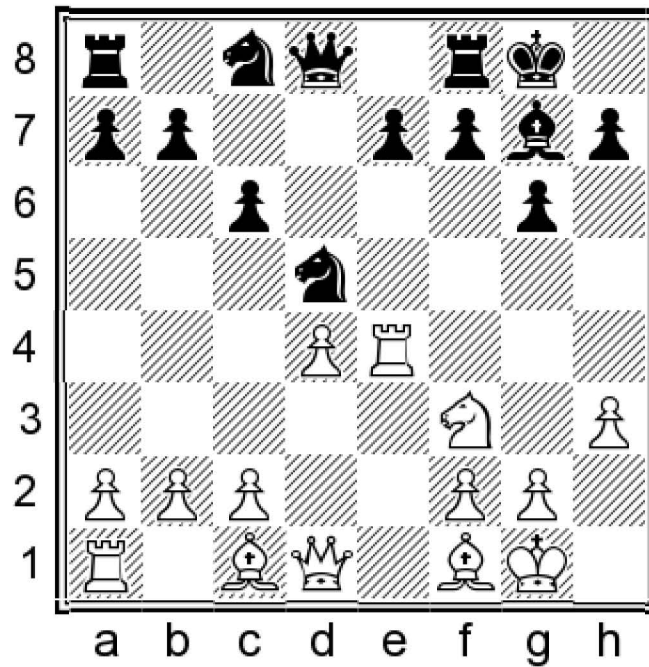


Position after: 14...Qb6+∞

This position is critical for the assessment of 10...c6. I'd rather be White after either 15.Kg3 or 15.Kf1 Ne5.

B2) 11.Bf1 Bf5 12.c3 a5 13.Nh4 e6 Spreemann, R (2464) – Nogler, S (2412) Remote email 2013. Black stands a bit worse here but it's nothing too serious.

11.Bf1 Bf5 12.Ne4 c6 13.h3 Bxe4 14.Rxe4 Nc8²



Position after: 14...Nc8²

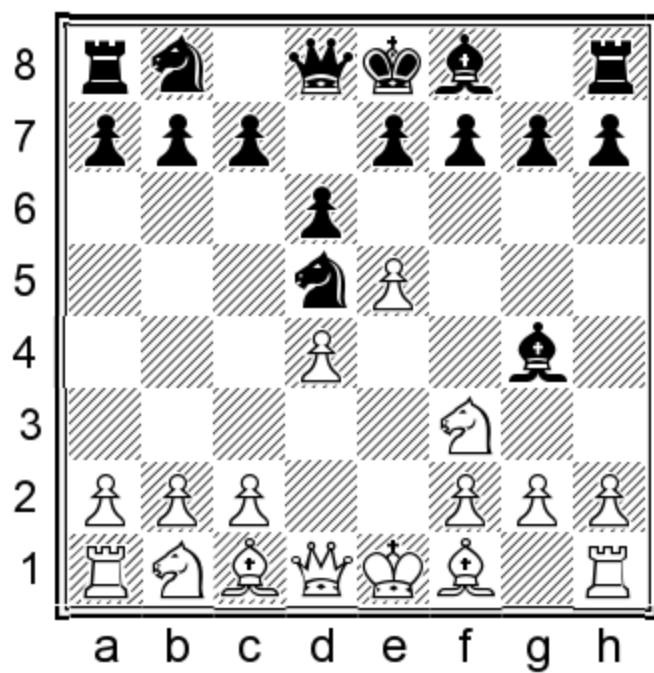
Diaz, S (2472) – Brunsteins, D (2388) ICCF email 2009. White has the pair of bishops and a space advantage.

Conclusion: The line 5...g6 remains quite viable and leads generally to a solid game for Black, especially if he doesn't allow the exchange sacrifice Rxe6 in the early middlegame and settles for ...c7-c6 rather than the more active ...c7-c5 (indeed, he often has to). While his position is a hard nut to crack, Black may have to be patient to get some counterplay.

Chapter 9

Modern Variation with 4...Bg4

1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.Nf3 Bg4



Chapter Guide

Chapter 9 – Modern Variation with 4...Bg4

1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.Nf3 Bg4 5.Be2 e6 6.c4 Nb6

a) 5...c6 alternative b) 7.exd6 cxd6 8.h3 Bh5 9.Qb3

c) 7.exd6 cxd6 8.h3 Bh5 9.Nc3 Be7 10.d5 e5 11.g4 Bg6 12.h4

d) 7.exd6 cxd6 8.h3 Bh5 9.Nc3 Be7 10.d5 e5 11.g4 Bg6 12.Be3

e) 7.0-0 with 10.Be3 --

f) 7.0-0 with 10.Be3 d5 11.g4

g) 7.0-0 with 10.Be3 d5 11.b3, 11.cxd5

h) 7.0-0 with 10.Be3 d5 11.c5 Bxf3 12.Bxf3

i) 7.0-0 with 10.Be3 d5 11.c5 Bxf3 12.gxf3 N6d7

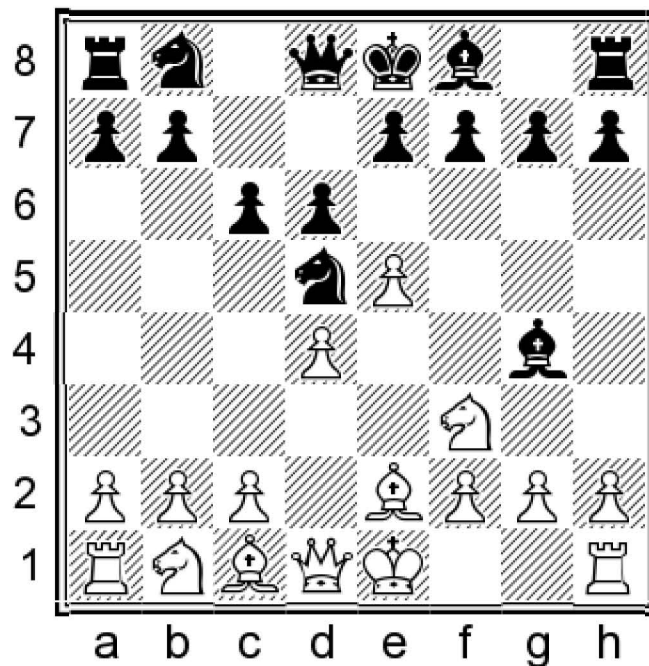
j) 7.0-0 with 10.Be3 d5 11.c5 Bxf3 12.gxf3 Nc8 13.Kh2, 13.b4

k) 7.0-0 with 10.Be3 d5 11.c5 Bxf3 12.gxf3 Nc8 13.f4 --

l) 7.0-0 with 10.Be3 d5 11.c5 Bxf3 12.gxf3 Nc8 13.f4 Nc6

a) 5...c6 alternative

1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.Nf3 Bg4 5.Be2 c6

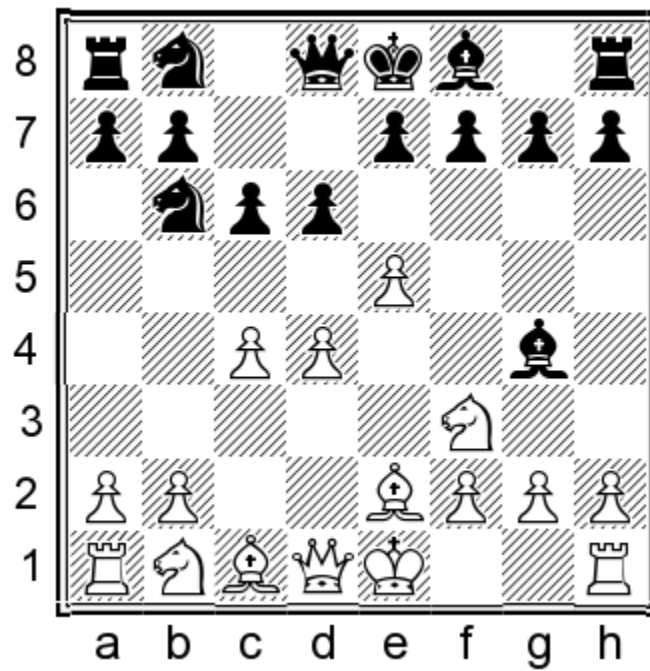


Position after: 5...c6

As mentioned in the relevant section, this position could arise from the move order 1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.Nf3 c6 5.Be2 Bg4. A simple path to a neat white edge is now linked with the offer to swap the light-squared bishops. For that aim the white knight will jump to g5, either now or after the inclusion of 6.c4 Nb6. I would not, however, recommend 6.0-0 to White in view of ...Bxf3 (6...Bxf3) 7.Bxf3 dxe5 8.dxe5 e6. Objectively this should be a bit better for him, but Black's position is a tough nut to crack and rather easy to handle. Enough talk, here you have some illustrations of everything.

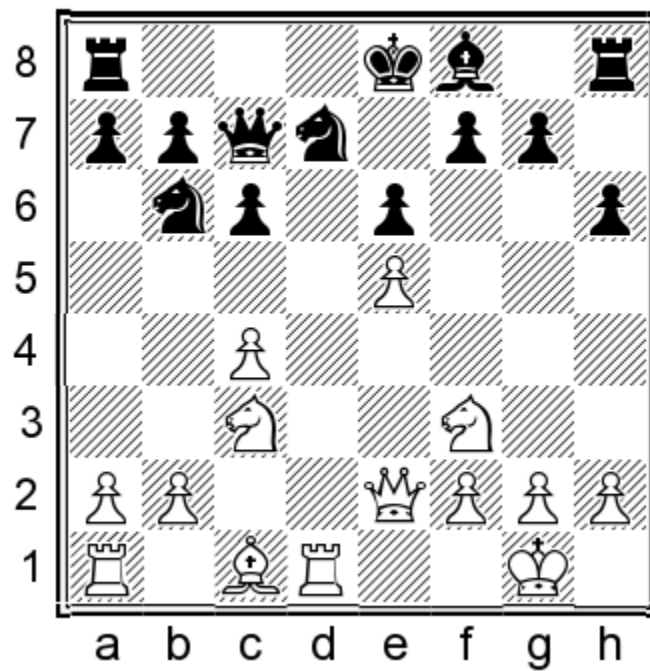
6.Ng5

A) 6.c4 Nb6 This retreat is the most frequently played. [Less popular is 6...Nc7, when 7.exd6 exd6 8.0-0 is a bit better for White owing to his space advantage.]



Position after: 6...Nb6

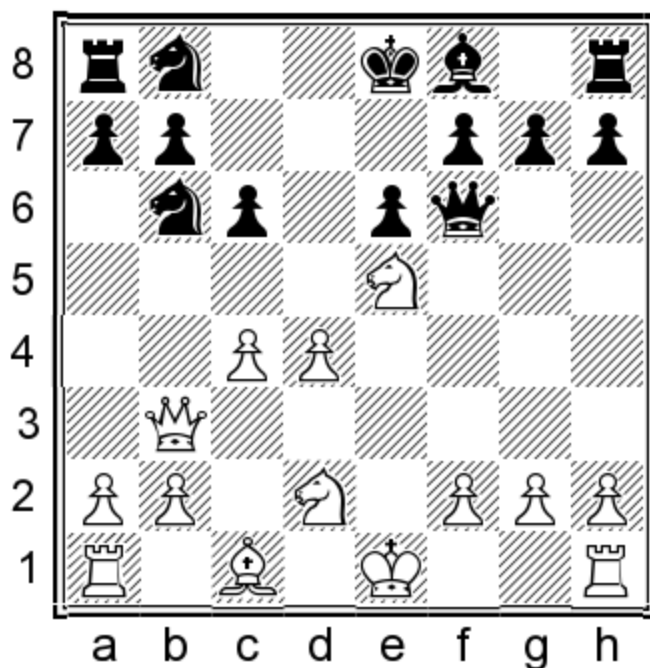
A1) 7.Ng5 Bxe2 8.Qxe2 dxe5 9.dxe5 h6 10.Nf3 e6 11.0-0 N8d7 12.Nc3 Qc7 13.Rd1



Position after: 13.Rd1

This was at least ² in Bacrot, E (2696) – Coursaget, N (2311) Chartres 2017. Black faces a serious danger that a later Ne4-d6 will do him harm.

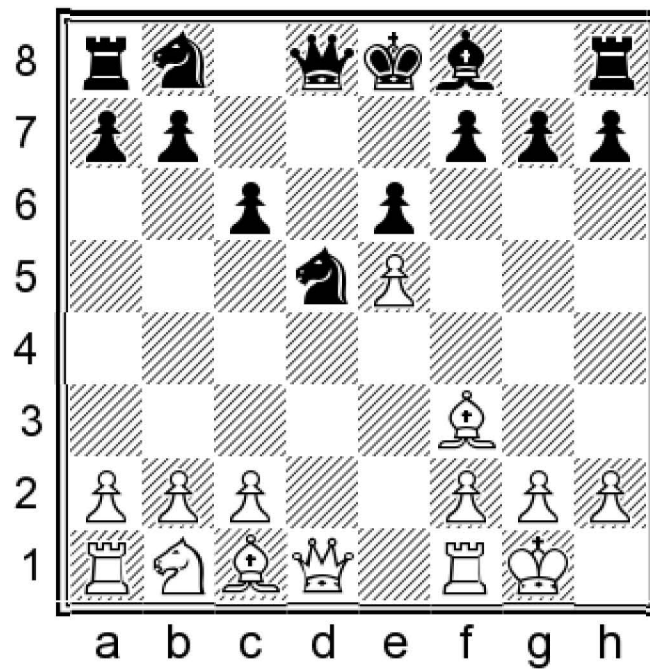
A2) 7.Nbd2 is quite good too. 7...dxe5 8.Nxe5 Bxe2 [8...Bf5 9.Ndf3²] 9.Qxe2 N8d7 Best. [The pawn on d4 is hardly touchable since after 9...Qxd4 10.Ndf3 Qc5 11.0-0 White will win further tempi on the queen, starting with 12.Be3.] Now White holds a comfortable ² thanks to his space advantage, but this is better than 9...e6?! 10.Qf3 Qf6 11.Qb3



Position after: 11.Qb3

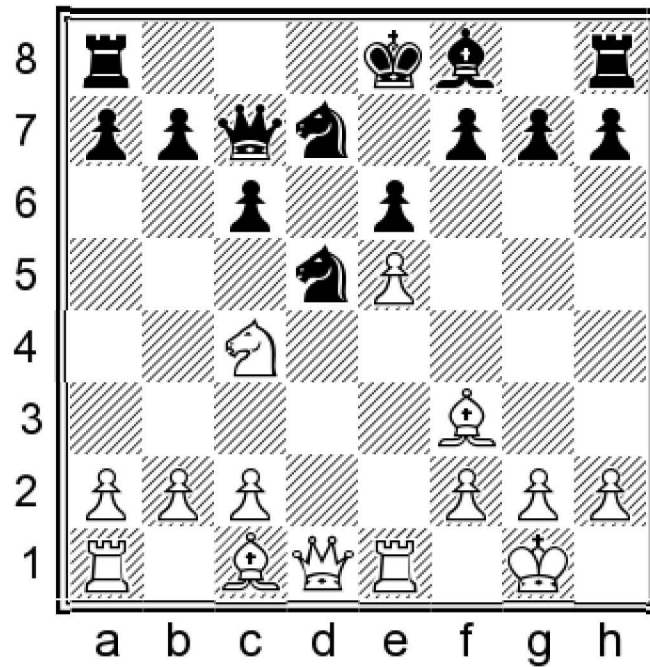
11...Qe7?! [the fact that the engine gives 11...Qd8 as the most tenacious defense says it all] 12.c5 Nd5 13.Ne4 Qc7 14.Qf3± Solodovnichenko, Y (2553) – Sergeev, V (2423) Kiev 2020.

B) 6.0-0 Bxf3 7.Bxf3 dxe5 8.dxe5 e6



Position after: 8...e6

B1) 9.Nd2 Nd7 10.Re1 Qc7 The most popular and logical continuation; putting pressure on the e5-pawn will enable Black to eventually castle long. [10...h6!? 11.a4 a5 12.g3 Qc7 13.Nc4 N7b6 14.Qd4 Nxc4 15.Qxc4² Karjakin, S (2727) – Short, N (2655) Kiev (rapid) 2008.] 11.Nc4

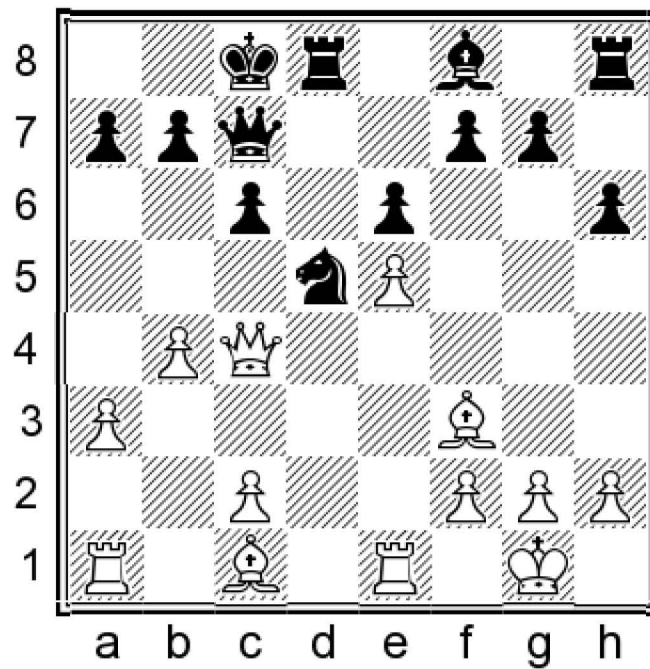


Position after: 11.Nc4

11...N7b6 [Black should avoid the known trick 11...b5? 12.Bxd5 cxd5 13.Nd6+ Bxd6 14.Qxd5!±.] 12.Qe2

B1.1) 12...Be7 13.Nd6+ [White should perhaps have preferred either 13.Nxb6 or 13.Bd2.] 13...Bxd6 14.exd6 Qxd6 15.c4 Nf6 16.b3 This gave White sufficient compensation for his missing pawn, but no more than that, in Wieczorek, O (2407) – Socko, B (2654) Warsaw 2014.

B1.2) 12...Nxc4 13.Qxc4 0-0-0 14.a3 h6 15.b4



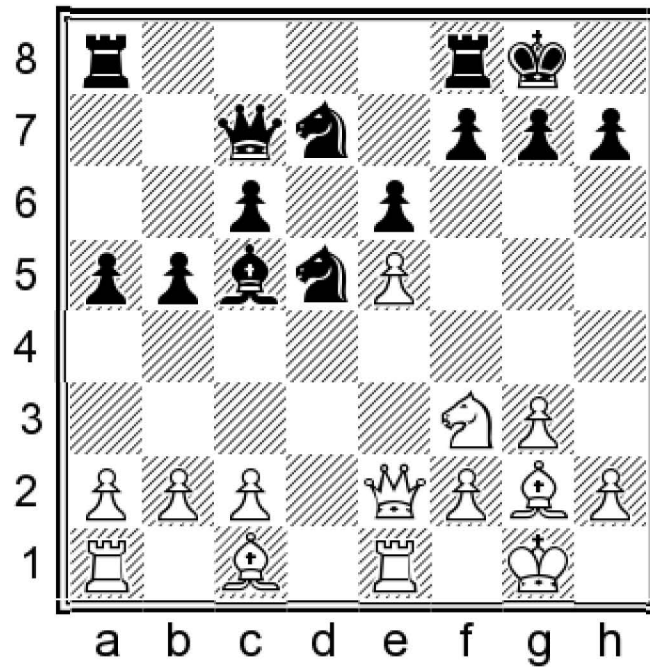
Position after: 15.b4

15...g5!? [the more restrained 15...Kb8 was the cautious approach]

16.Bb2?! [I prefer 16.Qe4! to keep an eye on g5 and follow up with c2-c4] 16...h5 17.g3 g4∞ Senff, M (2449) – Krasenkow, M (2647)

Germany 2007.

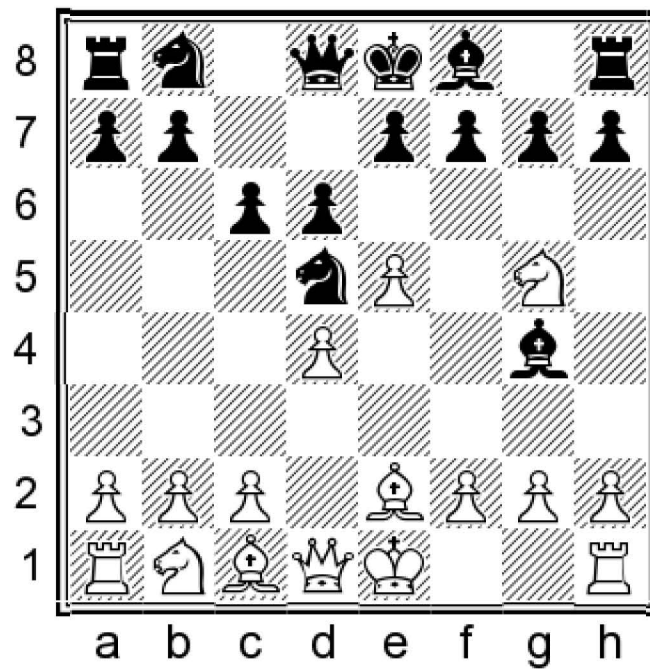
B2) 9.Qe2 Nd7 10.Re1 Qc7 11.g3 Bc5 12.Nd2 0-0 13.Bg2 a5 14.Nf3 b5



Position after: 14...b5

Leko, P (2555) – Onischuk, A (2590) Wijk aan Zee 1995. Although the machine slightly prefers White here, I believe Black is quite fine. Having already expanded on the queenside, he has made sure he won't lack counterplay if White launches an offensive on the other wing.

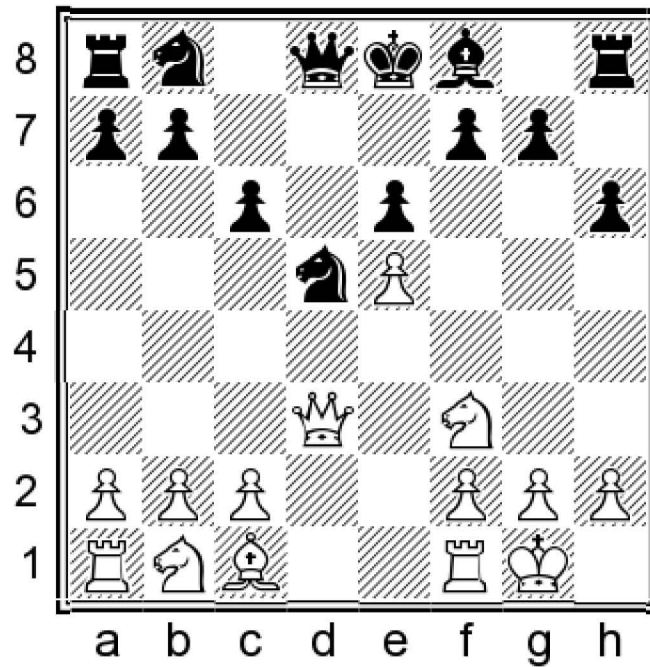
Let's return to 6.Ng5.



Position after: 6.Ng5

6...Bxe2

6...Bf5 7.Bd3 Bxd3 8.Qxd3 h6 [8...e6!?] 9.Nf3 e6 10.0-0 [White could have pushed 10.c4 at once, but he is in no hurry. In this position it would be too committal for Black to play ...b7-b5 in an effort to protect the knight's centralized position on d5.] 10...dxe5 11.dxe5²



Position after: 11.dxe5²

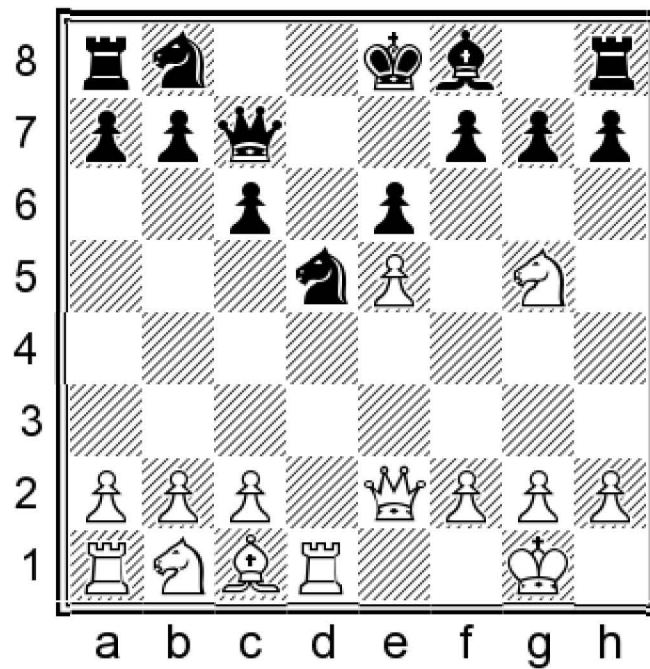
Short, N (2684) – Sergeev, V (2430) Warsaw 2004. Besides c2-c4 White's ideas include Rd1, a knight transfer to e4 and possibly a queen shift to g4.

7.Qxe2 dxe5 8.dxe5 e6 9.0-0 Qc7

9...Be7 10.Nf3 [10.Ne4!?] 10...Bc5? The fast time control probably explains this over-optimistic move. 11.c4 Ne7 12.Nc3 Ng6 13.Ne4± Bauer, C (2623) – Bulmaga, I (2440) chess.com 2020.

10.Rd1²

White will expel the powerful d5-knight and then see if he can attack on the kingside or else bring a knight to d6. His position is favorable.



Position after: 10.Rd1²

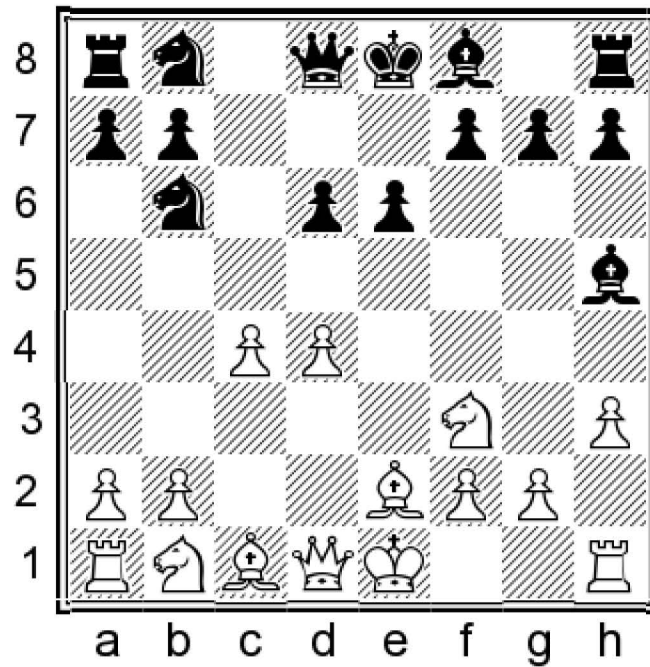
Tseshkovsky, V (2550) – Hort, V (2600) Manila 1976.

b) 7.exd6 cxd6 8.h3 Bh5 9.Qb3

1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.Nf3 Bg4 5.Be2 e6 6.c4 Nb6 7.exd6

White doesn't need to exchange at such an early stage unless he has a specific idea in mind, which could be to follow up with 8.h3 Bh5 9.Qb3.

7...cxd6 8.h3 Bh5



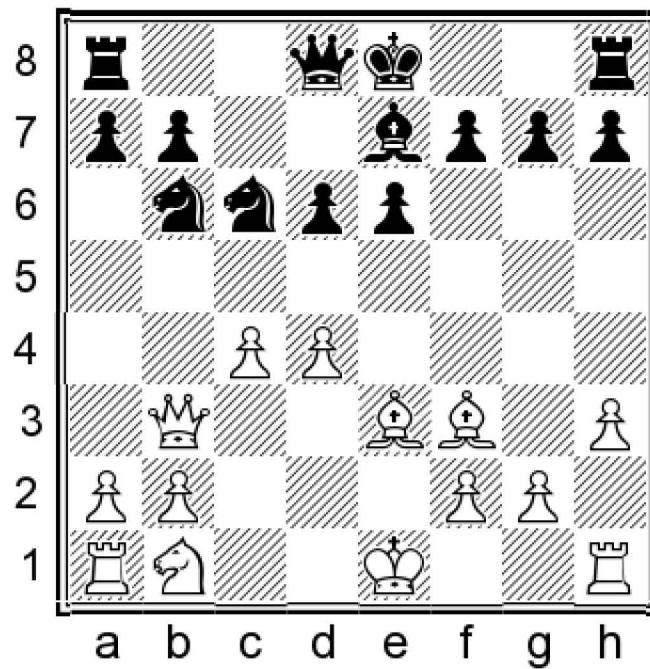
Position after: 8...Bh5

9.Qb3

9.0-0 d5 This move has never been tried before but it hardly changes anything. At any rate, it is no improvement on the common 9...Be7. 10.c5 The most ambitious. [10.cxd5 Nxd5 11.Nc3 Nc6 12.Qb3 is enough for a small plus.] 10...N6d7 [10...Nc8? is a mistake in view of 11.g4 Bg6 12.Qb3+–, intending 12...Qc7 13.Bf4!] 11.Qb3 Qc8 12.Bf4 Nc6 13.Qe3² White wants to continue Nc3 and then expand on the queenside. His space advantage secures him a pleasant edge.

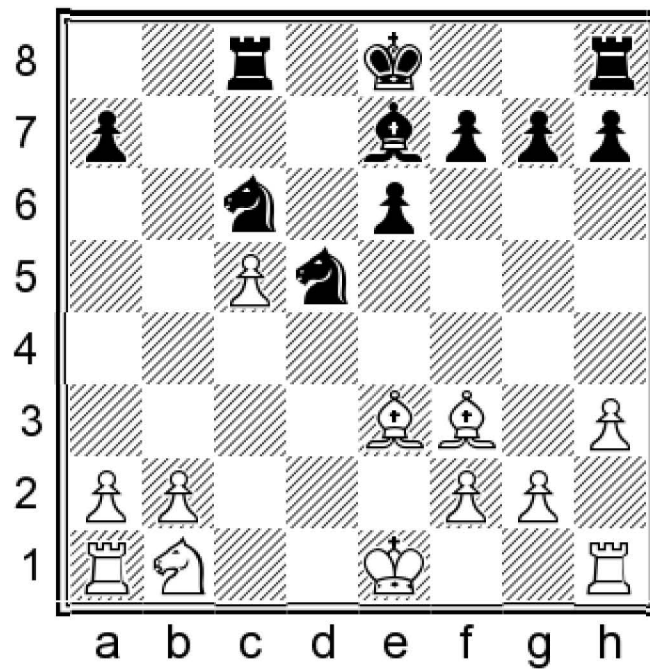
9...Nc6

A) 9...Be7?? 10.Qb5++– **B)** 9...Bxf3 10.Bxf3 Nc6 11.Be3 Be7



Position after: 11...Be7

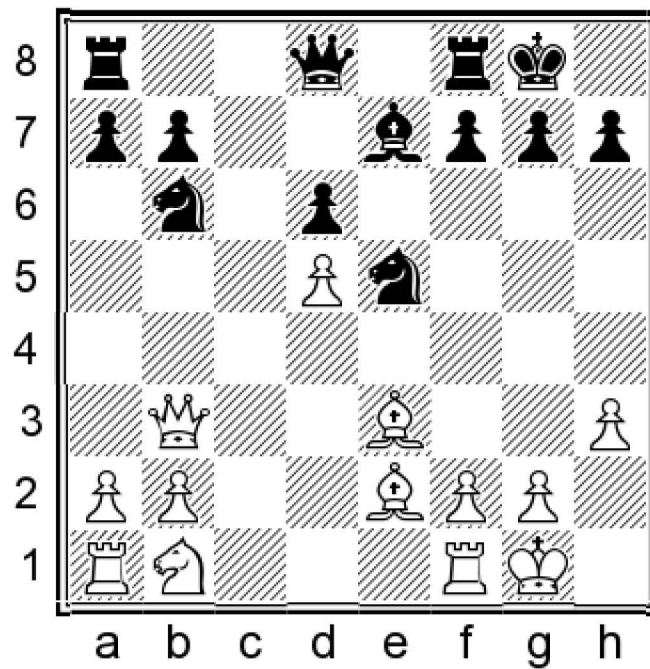
B1) 12.c5?! This direct move, used in Tarjan, J (2535) – Alburt, L (2560) Greenville 1983, isn't too promising. 12...dxc5 13.dxc5 Nd5 14.Qxb7 Qc8! 15.Qxc8+ Rxc8



Position after: 15...Rxc8

16.Nd2 [16.Bxd5 exd5= followed by ...d4 and ...Bxc5 is about equal.]
 16...Nxe3 17.fxe3 Nb4 [rather than 17...Bxc5?!, as played in the afore-
 mentioned game.] 18.Ke2 Bxc5=

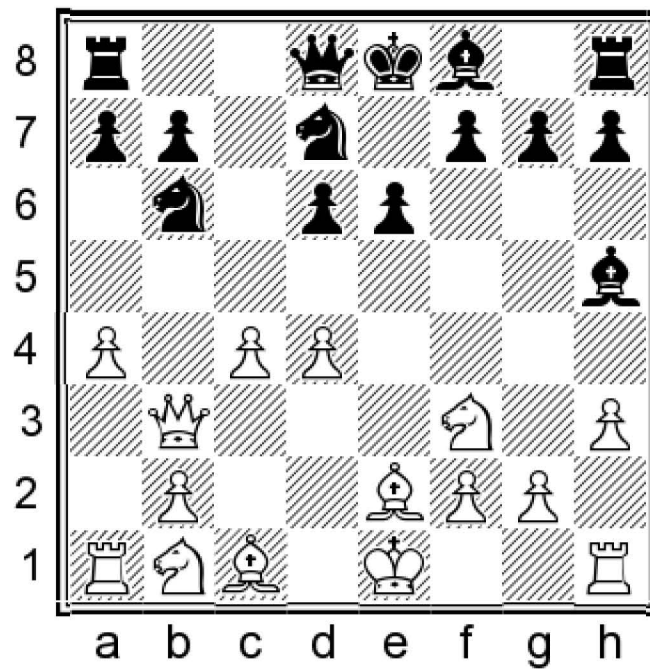
B2) It would have been more judicious to opt for the other tempting
 push: 12.d5 Ne5 13.Be2 exd5 14.cxd5 0-0 15.0-0.



Position after: 15.0-0

That being said, this position is similar to 6.0-0 Be7 7.c4 Nb6 8.Nc3 0-0 9.Be3 Nc6 10.exd6 cxd6 11.d5 exd5 12.cxd5 Bxf3 13.Bxf3 Ne5, which I label as “acceptable for Black” in the related section.

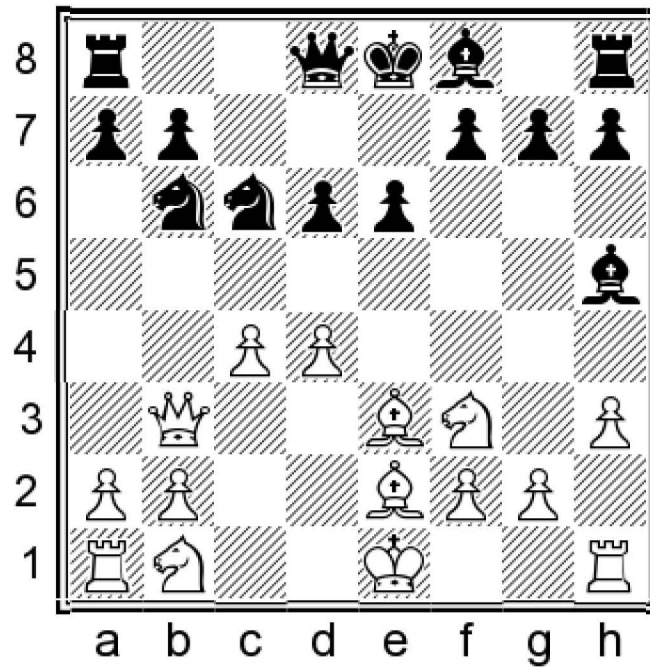
C) 9...N8d7 This happened in Manik, M (2485) – Majer, J (2292) Pardubice 2005, when rather than the flabby 10.Be3?! White should have probed the queenside with 10.a4!.



Position after: 10.a4!

Now if 10...a5 the black horses are far away from the weak b4-square, so that the insertion of a4 and ...a5 has undoubtedly favored White this time, while 10...d5 11.c5 Nc4 12.Nbd2 yields White a nice initiative.

10.Be3

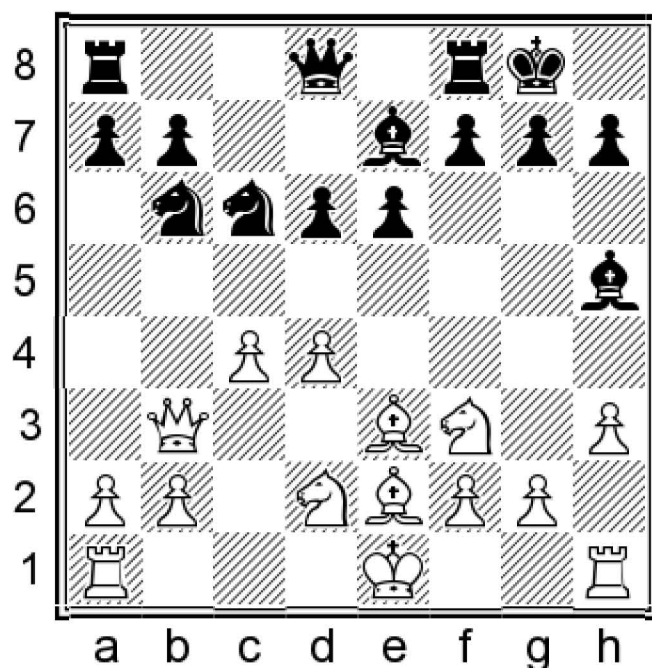


Position after: 10.Be3

10...Be7

10...Qd7? was Stratil, L (2370) – Pribyl, J (2430) Prague 1992, where now 11.d5!± is strong, for if 11...Bxf3 12.gxf3 the white activity is more important than his shattered pawn structure.

11.Nbd2 0-0



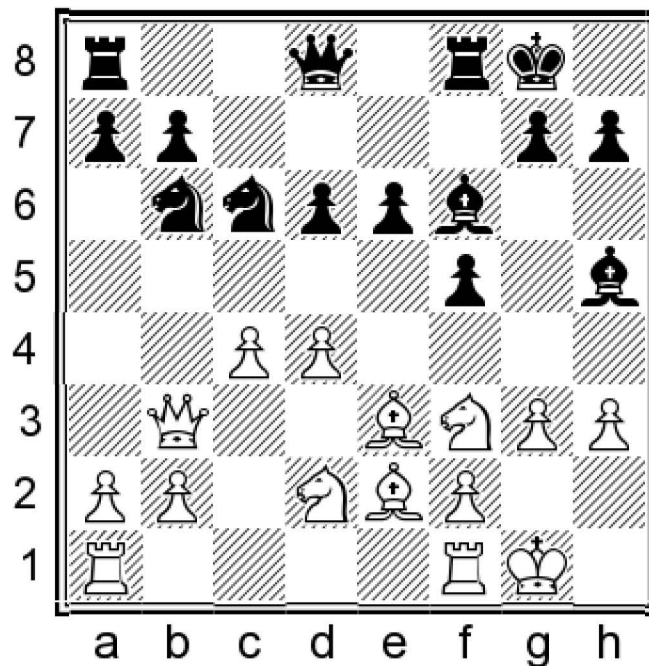
Position after: 11...0-0

This position, important for 9.Qb3 adepts, turns out to be balanced. Here are some possible follow-ups.

12.a4

We are following Cordovil, J – Dias, P Lisbon 2003, where rather than ...Qc7 more active attempts need to be examined.

A) 12.0-0 f5!? [In the event of 12...Bf6 White should again try to seize the initiative with the energetic 13.a4! rather than 13.Qb5?! Bg6= Manik, M (2478) – Gazik, I (2359) Slovakia 1999.] 13.g3 Bf6∞

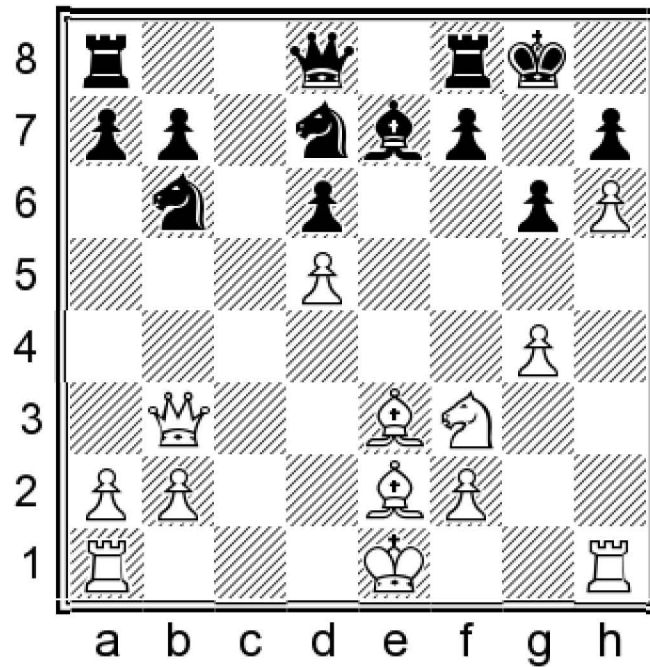


Position after: 13...Bf6

An unusual picture, with the black pawn at f5 rather than f7, and the white knight placed on d2. Black is ready to meet both the c4-c5 and d4-d5 pushes, he has adequate control of the center and could think about ... e6-e5 after the preparatory ...Kh8. Having weakened his kingside with g2-g3 is undoubtedly a concession from White.

B) 12.d5!?

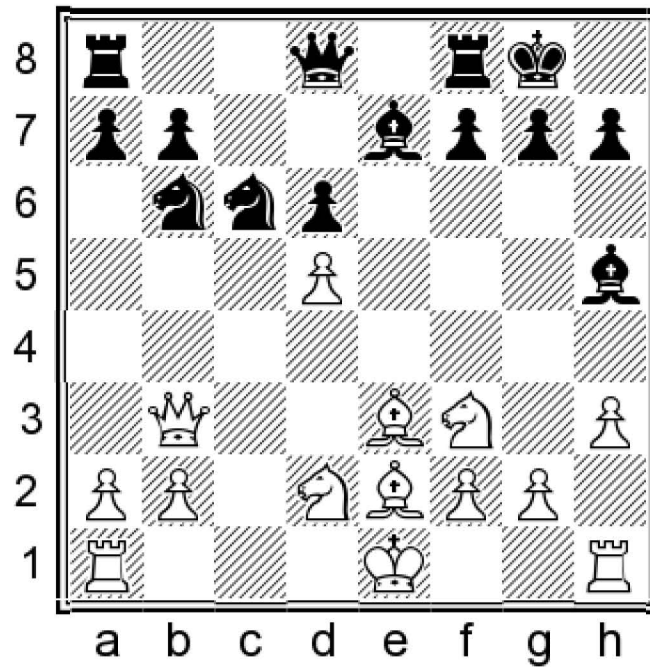
B1) 12...Nb8 keeps the game more complicated but is objectively inferior. 13.g4 [13.dxe6 fxe6 14.0-0 Nc6² was available and probably easier to handle.] 13...Bg6 14.h4 exd5 15.h5 Be4 [15...dxc4!?] 16.cxd5 Bxf3 17.Nxf3 N8d7 18.h6 g6



Position after: 18...g6

This position was reached in Truupold, A (2476) – Bricke, W (2469) ICCF corr 2002, where rather than 19.g5 White could have considered hiding his king on the queenside, with 19.0-0-0!∞.

B2) 12...exd5! 13.cxd5

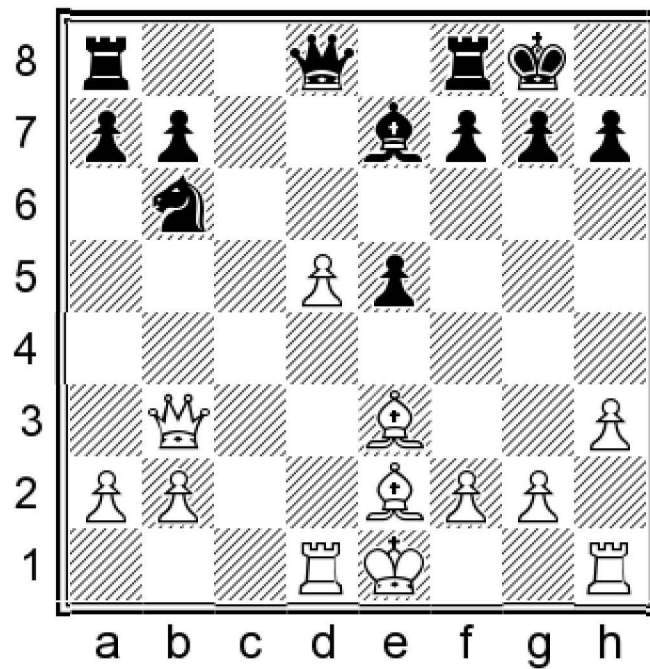


Position after: 13.cxd5

Black now needs to choose between two options. Let's examine both of them.

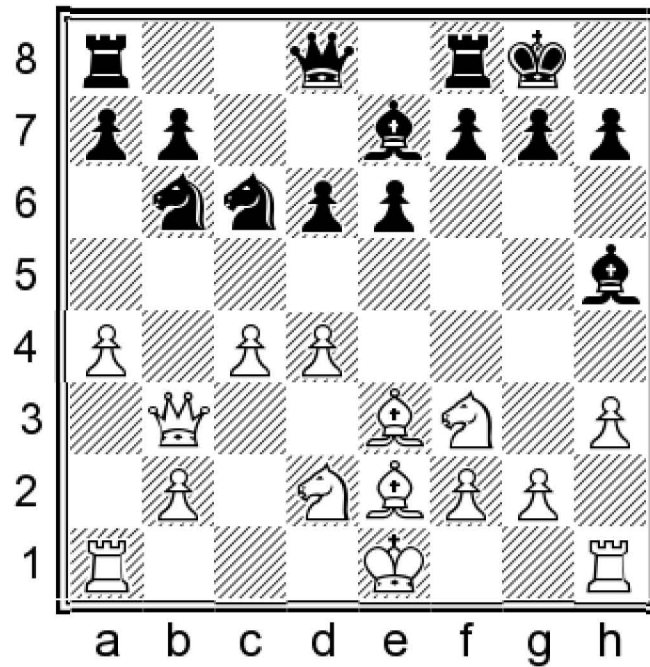
B2.1) 13...Ne5, when 14.Nxe5 Bxe2 15.Nxf7!? Rxf7 16.Kxe2 Bg5 provides him enough compensation for his missing pawn.

B2.2) 13...Bxf3 14.Nxf3 Ne5 15.Nxe5 dxe5 16.Rd1



Position after: 16.Rd1

The white passer must be blocked before Black pushes ...f7-f5. Both 16...Bd6 and 16...Qd6 17.0-0 Rfd8 are unclear and probably dynamically balanced.



Position after: 12.a4

12...f5

A) Following 12...e5 13.d5 Nd4² Black shouldn't get enough compensation if his opponent takes twice on d4.

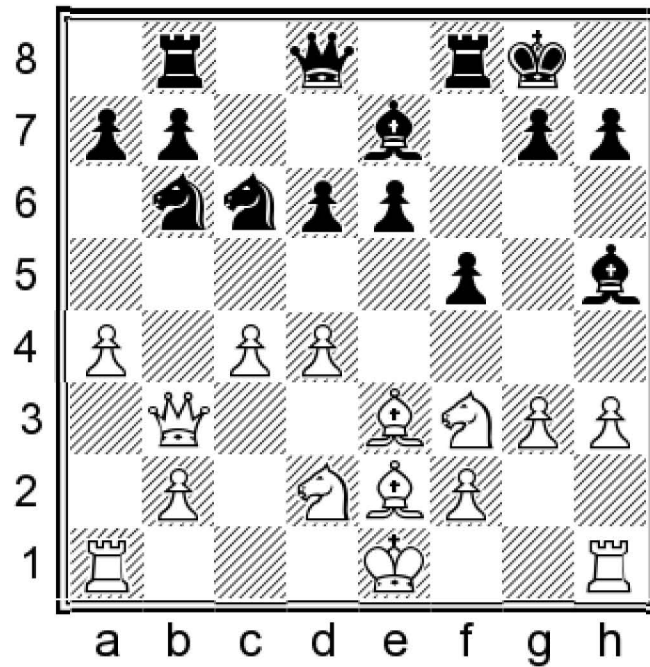
B) The consequences of 12...a5 13.Qb5 d5 14.c5 Nd7 15.Qxb7 Nb4 are nebulous after 16.Bb5!.

13.g3

Or 13.a5 f4[∞].

13...Rb8

As stated in the note to 12.0-0 f5 13.g3 Bf6, Black is happy to have provoked g2-g3. A rich middlegame lies ahead!

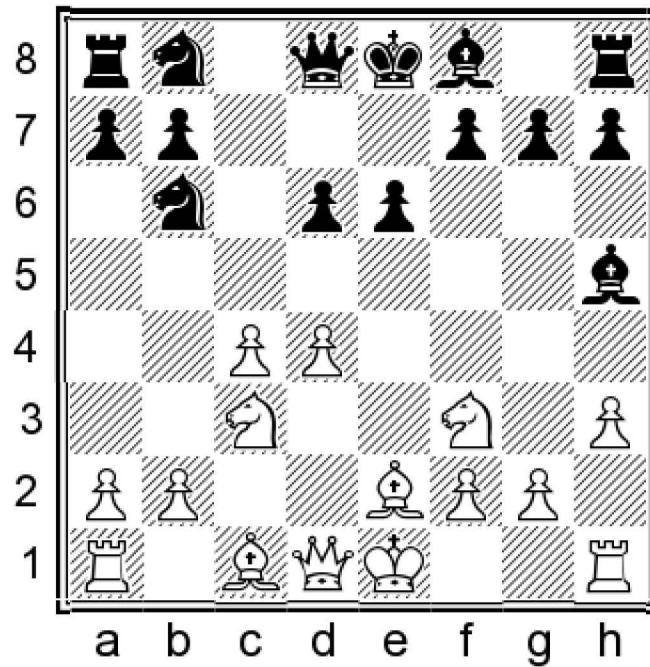


Position after: 13...Rb8

Conclusion: I'd say that if Black reacts with care to the rare 9.Qb3 he will certainly get his share of play. White might get an edge out of the opening, with a timely a2-a4 and/or d4-d5, but it's not as clear as in the more academic lines.

c) 7.exd6 cxd6 8.h3 Bh5 9.Nc3 Be7 10.d5 e5 11.g4 Bg6 12.h4

1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.Nf3 Bg4 5.Be2 e6 6.c4 Nb6 7.exd6 cxd6 8.h3 Bh5 9.Nc3

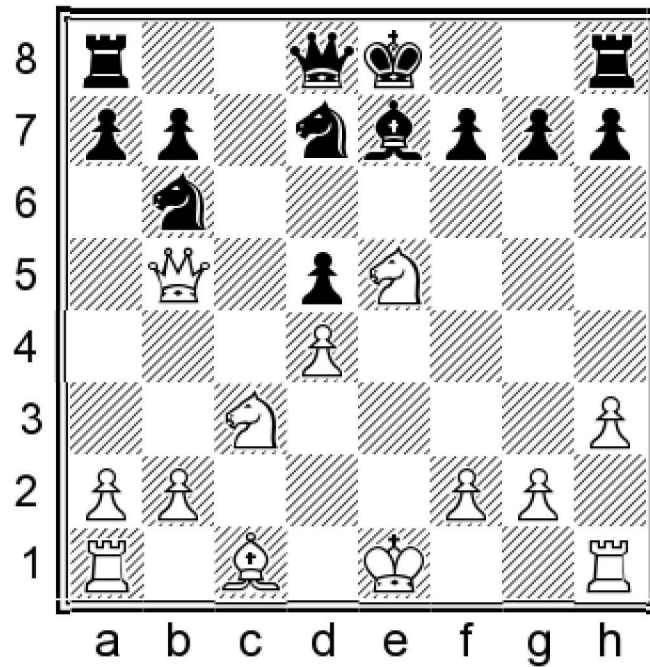


Position after: 9.Nc3

9...Be7

Black can try to avoid the 10.d5 e5 11.g4 line by acting immediately in the center with 9...d5, but he faces other problems this way. This certainly explains why this somewhat dubious push has been tried only four times out of about 200 games. 10.cxd5 [10.c5 N6d7 11.b4² is equally good.]

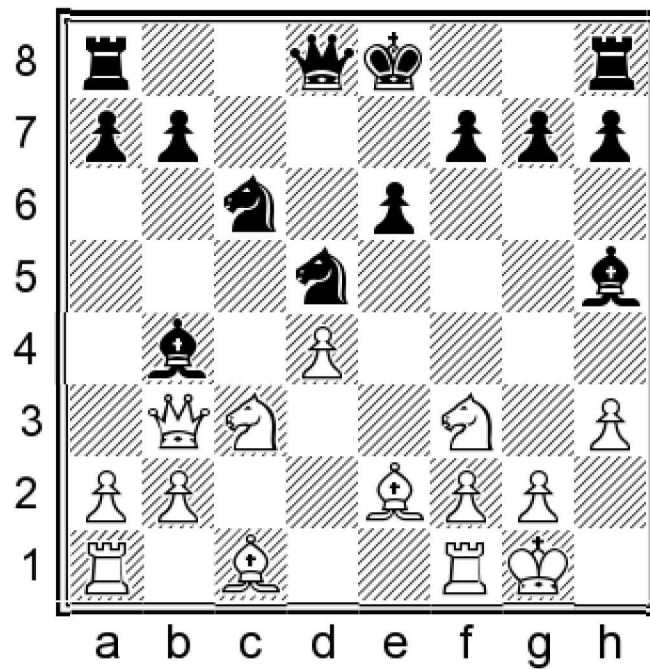
A) 10...exd5?! leads to more serious worries following 11.Ne5 Bxe2 12.Qxe2 Be7 13.Qb5+ N8d7



Position after: 13...N8d7

as in Vazquez Igarza, R (2442) – Almeida Quintana, O (2484) Havana 2002. Rather than the greedy 14.Nxd5?!, which ended up being unclear after 14...a6 15.Qb3 Nxe5 16.Nxb6 Bb4+! 17.Kf1 Qxb6 18.dxe5, White should have preferred 14.0-0 a6 15.Qb3 Nxe5 16.dxe5± when a rook will soon arrive on d1.

B) 10...Nxd5 11.Qb3 Bb4 12.0-0 Nc6



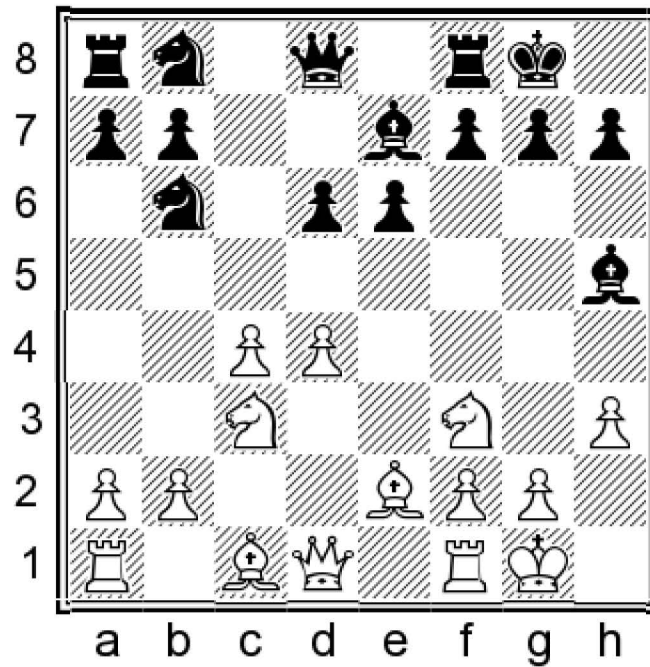
Position after: 12...Nc6

Black needs only one move to consolidate and his opponent therefore has to keep up the momentum. 13.Nxd5 Qxd5 14.Bc4 Qd6 15.d5 exd5 16.Bxd5 0-0. Obviously White stands better, but how big is his advantage?

10.d5

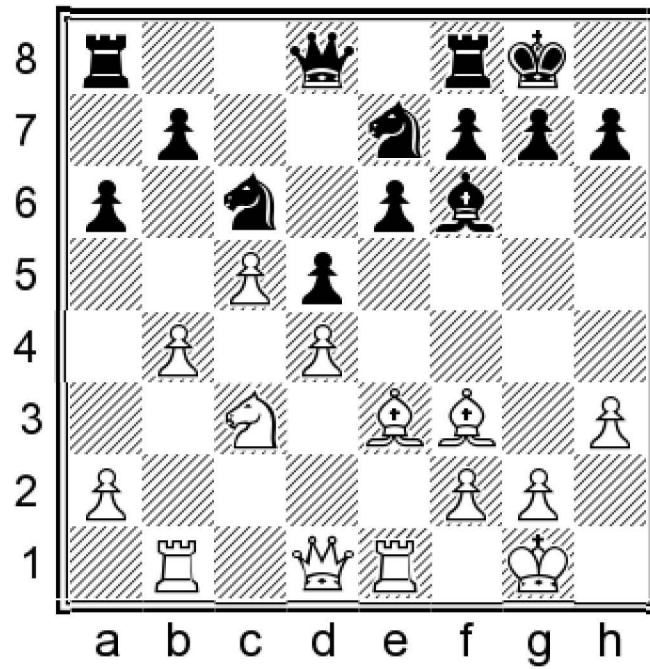
If White is reluctant to enter the sharp 10.d5 e5 11.g4 line, then 10.0-0 represents his bale-out. On rare occasions 10.Be3 and 10.b3 have been tried but they just seem to deprive White of some options for nothing in return.

10.0-0 0-0



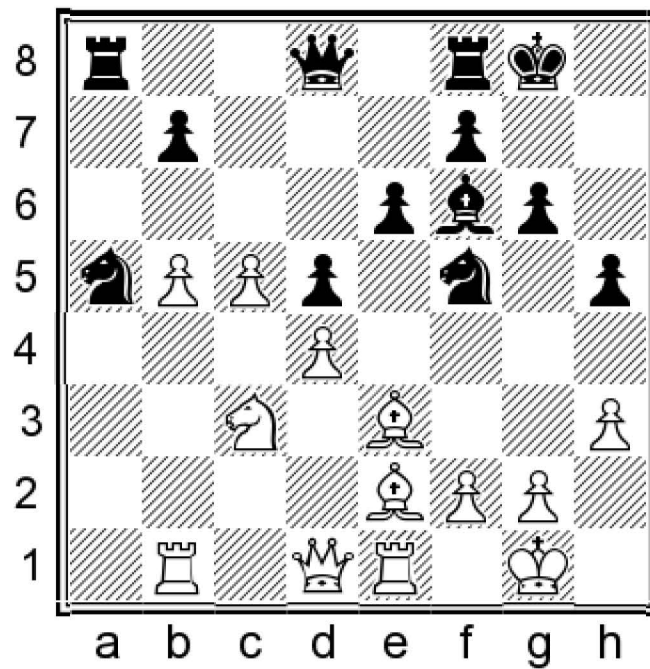
Position after: 10...0-0

A) 11.Re1 I am not sure if this move is essential, but the old game Smyslov, V (2550) – Schmidt, W (2505) Moscow 1980 continued this way: 11...a6 [11...d5 was already fairly standard but Black's 11th move will prove useful in stopping b4-b5 later on] 12.b3 Nc6 13.Be3 d5 14.c5 Bxf3 15.Bxf3 Nc8 16.Rb1 Bf6 17.b4 N8e7.



Position after: 17...N8e7

We can also witness this typical maneuver in the line 1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.c4 Nb6 5.exd6 cxd6 6.Nc3 g6 7.Be3 Bg7 8.Rc1 0-0 9.b3 Bf5 and so on. 18.Bg4 g6 19.a4 h5 20.b5 axb5 21.axb5 Na5 22.Be2 Nf5,,

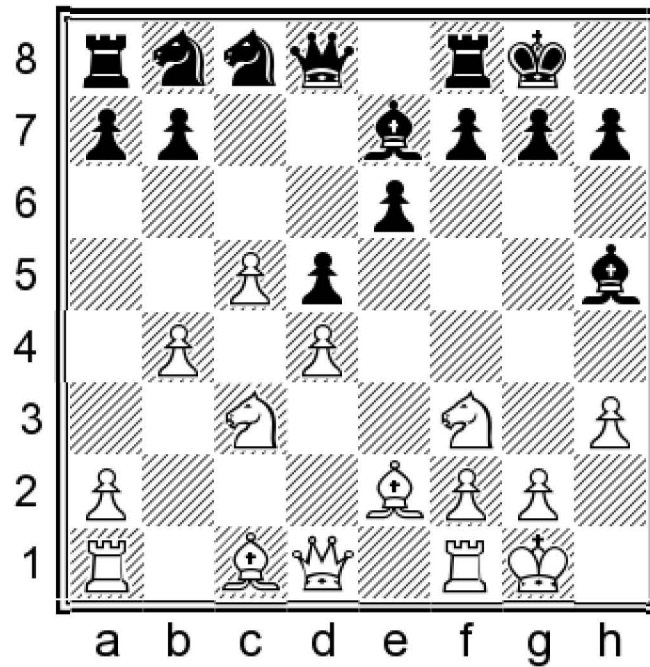


Position after: 22...Nf5,,

The computer prefers White here, but with the pressure on d4 and the eventual option to trade with ...Nxe3, Black looks fine to me.

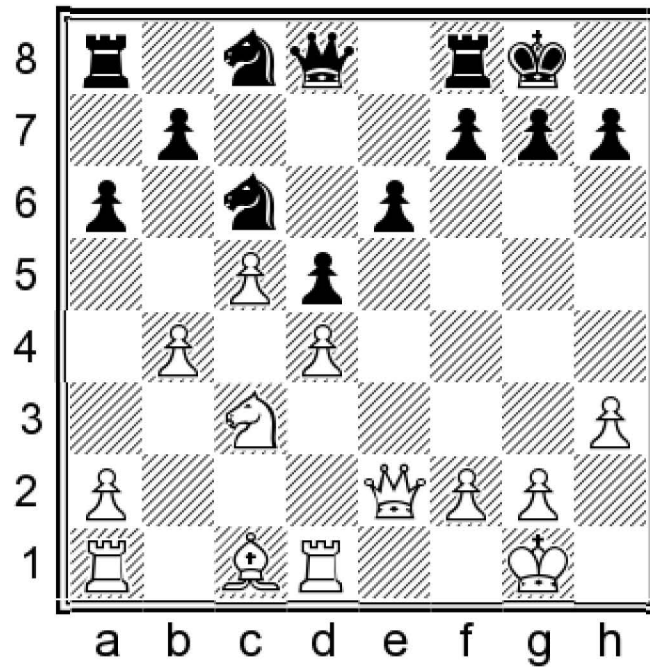
B) 11.b3

B1) 11...d5 will often transpose. 12.c5 Nc8 13.b4



Position after: 13.b4

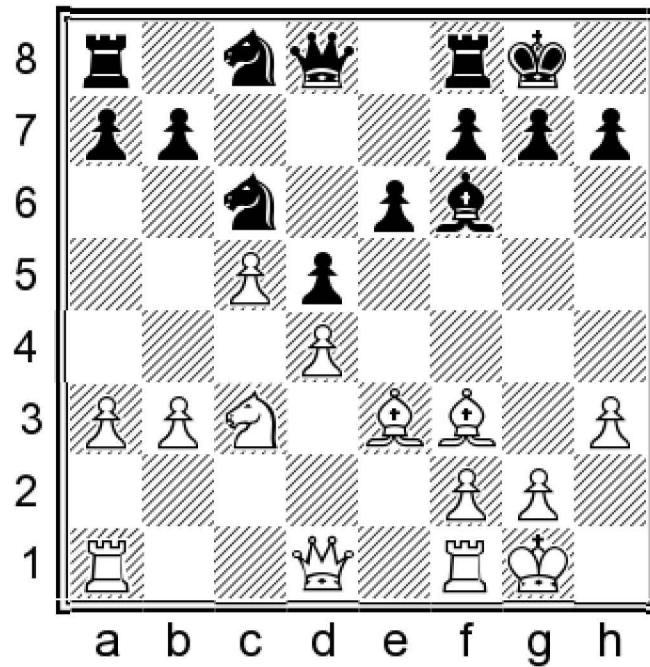
13...a6 [If Black wishes to avoid the coming knight sally he should go for 13...Bxf3 14.Bxf3 a6.] 14.Ne5 Bxe2 15.Qxe2 Bf6 [15...Nc6 16.Nxc6 bxc6 intending ...Bf6 and ...Ne7-f5 was playable too.] 16.Rd1 Bxe5 17.Qxe5 Nc6 18.Qe2



Position after: 18.Qe2

18...N8e7 [18...Qf6!? followed by ...N8e7 deserves attention.] 19.Bg5
 White stood perhaps a tad better but not more in the blitz game Adams,
 M (2729) – Ponomarev, R (2705) Moscow 2007.

B2) 11...Nc6 12.Be3 d5 13.c5 Nc8 14.a3 Bxf3 15.Bxf3 Bf6,,

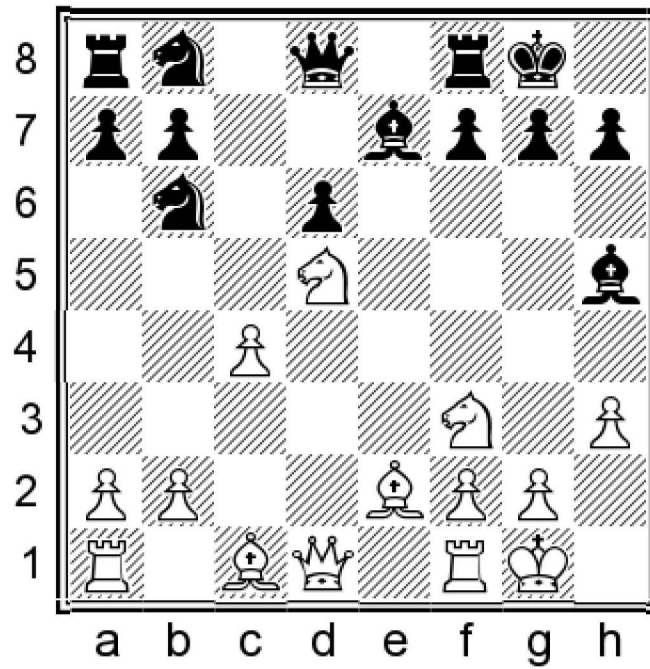


Position after: 15...Bf6,,

Bacallao Alonso, Y (2580) – Hernandez Carmenates, H (2570) Havana 2012, with a scenario very similar to the Smyslov – Schmidt encounter, see 11.Re1.

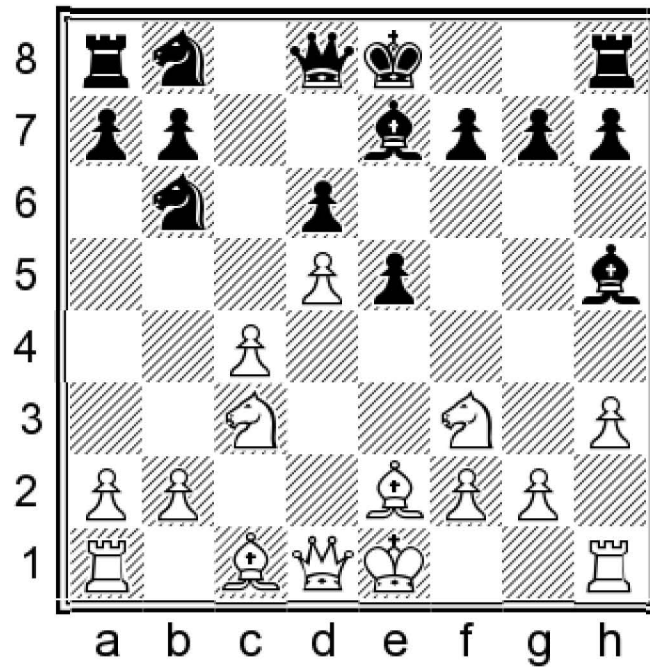
10...e5

10...exd5 11.Nxd5! 0-0 12.0-0



Position after: 12.0-0

White stands better positionally and the attempt to win material by 12...Bxf3?! 13.Bxf3 Nxc4 fails to 14.Qc2 Ne5 15.Be4! Nbc6 16.Bxh7+ Kh8 17.f4±.

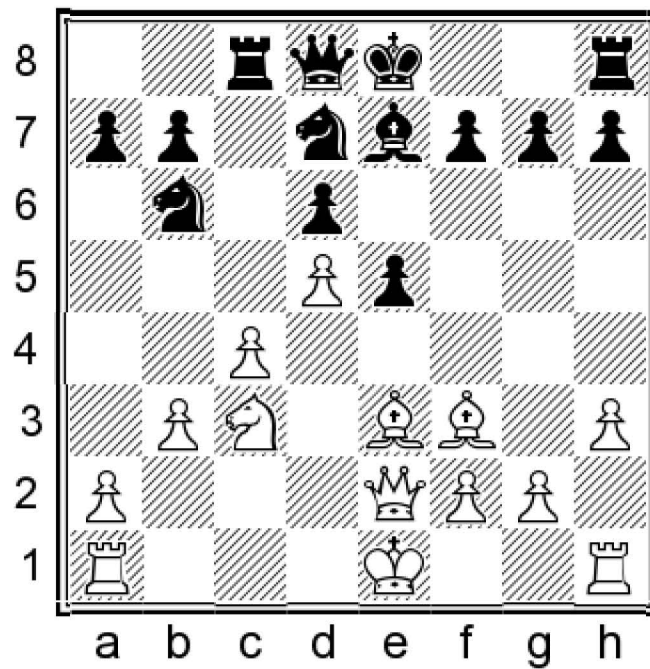


Position after: 10...e5

11.g4!

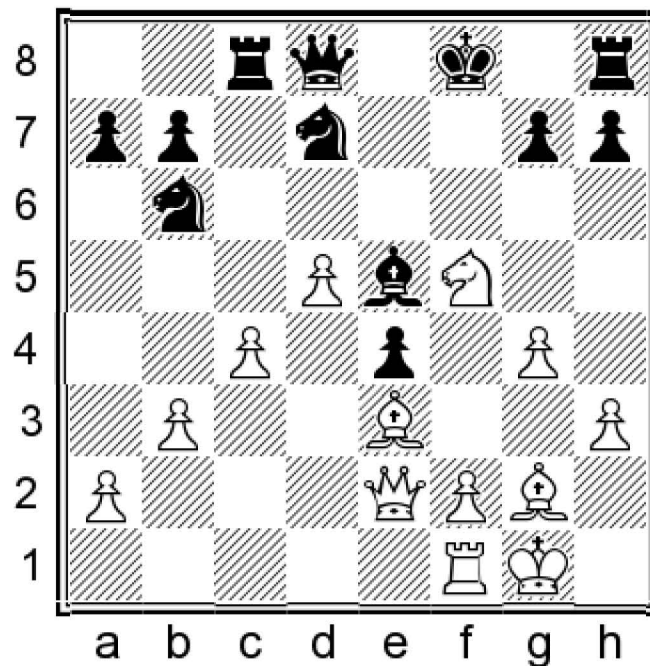
A) 11.0-0?! 0-0 12.Be3 Bxf3! Black plans ...f7-f5 or ...Be7-g5; this is certainly not what White is aiming for.

B) Starting with 11.Be3 gives Black the extra option of 11...Bxf3!?, when the desirable trade of the dark-squared bishops by ...Bg5 could happen soon [11...Na6!]. 12.Bxf3 Some care is needed from the Black side now. 12...N8d7 [12...Bg5? 13.Bxg5 Qxg5 14.Nb5 with 15.c5 coming, Black is in trouble.] 13.Qe2 [13.b3!?] 13...Rc8 14.b3



Position after: 14.b3

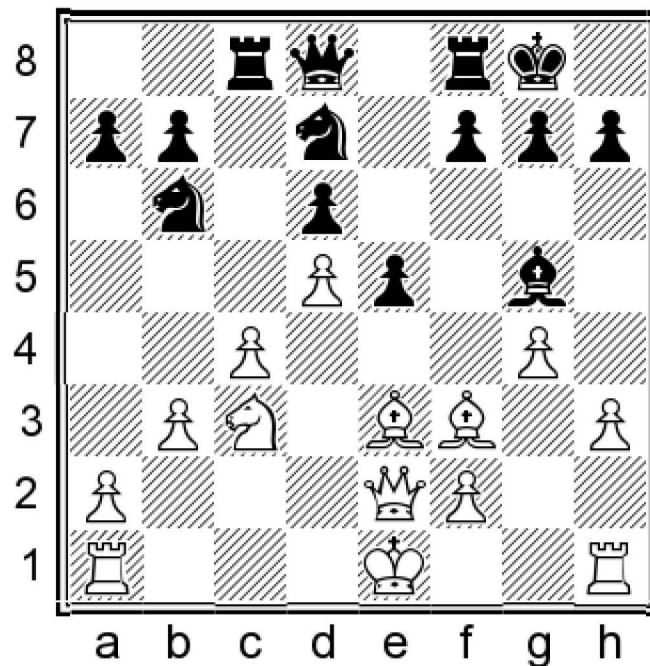
B1) After 14...f5?! 15.g4! e4 16.Bg2 Bf6 Black was hit by an inspired rook sacrifice in Bologan, V – Tischbierek, R Vienna 1996: 17.Nb5!! Bxa1 18.Nxd6+ Kf8 19.0-0 Be5 20.Nxf5±.



Position after: 20.Nxf5±

At this point Black was clearly worse but for some strange reason Chetverik and Kalinichenko indicate that he could have defended better with 20...g6, instead of the game continuation 20...h5?!. Their main line runs 21.Nd4 Kg8 and so on, but the engine claims that both 21.Ng3 and 21.f4 are much better. For instance, 21.Ng3 Nc5 22.f4 Bd6 23.b4± or 21.f4 exf3. Otherwise, depending on where the bishop goes, 22.Nd6 or 22.Nd4 can follow. 22.Qxf3 Qf6 23.Qe4!±.

B2) 14...0-0! 15.g4 Bg5



Position after: 15...Bg5

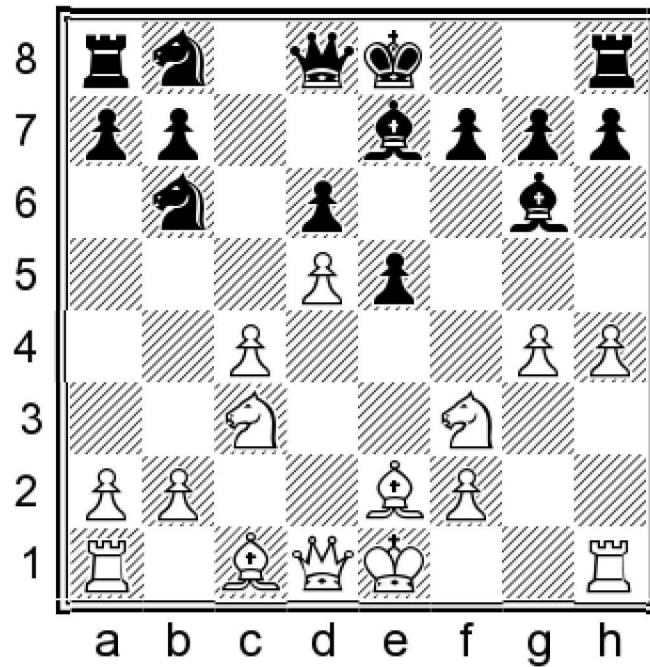
16.h4 [16.Be4 Bf4,,] 16...Bxe3 [16...Bxh4? is of course too dangerous:
17.Be4 g6 18.Qd2±; 16...Bf4!?] 17.Qxe3 Nc5∞ White can't easily open
lines on the kingside and he will be worried a bit about the safety of his
king. Black's ideas include...a5-a4 or possibly ...e5-e4.

11...Bg6

White's strategy entails some positional risks but the dynamic factors of the position speak in his favor. Practice has shown that careful play is required by Black in order not to land in a delicate situation.

We will now examine 12.h4 (this subchapter) and the main move 12.Be3 (following subchapter).

12.h4



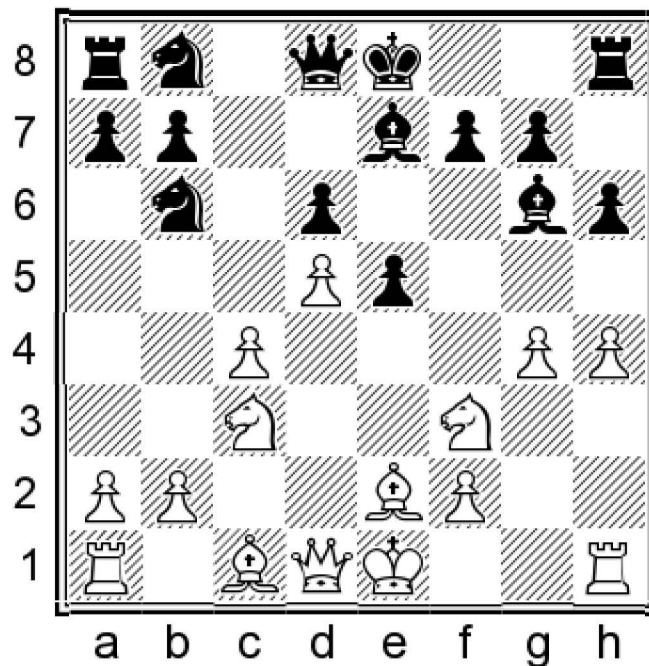
Position after: 12.h4

This should eventually come to the same thing as 12.Be3 (which is covered in the following subchapter).

12...h5

A) 12...e4?! 13.Ng5 0-0 14.Ngxe4± was played in Messa, R – Corvi, M Verona 1997.

B) It seems that the less radical 12...h6!? leaves White more options.

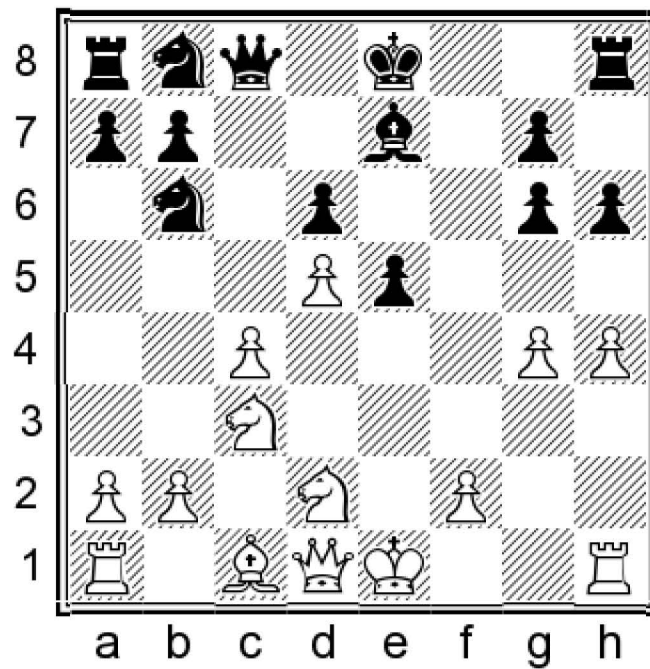


Position after: 12...h6!?

B1) In the event of 13.Bd3 I'd dare to suggest 13...Na6!?, which is a novelty if I checked correctly.

B1.1) 13...Bxd3 14.Qxd3 Na6 [White welcomes the pawn trade in 14...Qc8?! 15.b3 Qxg4 16.Rg1± followed by 17.Rxg7 as he activates his rook.] 15.b3² [Not 15.Be3?! when 15...Qc8! hits both c4 and g4, though things aren't so clear.]

B1.2) 13...Qc8 14.Bxg6! [14.b3!? from Hungaski, R (2400) – Minasian, A (2479) Moscow 2006 is an interesting pawn sacrifice if White follows up in an appropriate manner. 14...Qxg4 15.Rg1 Qh5 16.Bxg6 fxg6 Now the mistaken 17.Qd3 was better for Black after 17...0-0 but 17.Nd2 would have provided adequate compensation.] 14...fxg6 15.Nd2²

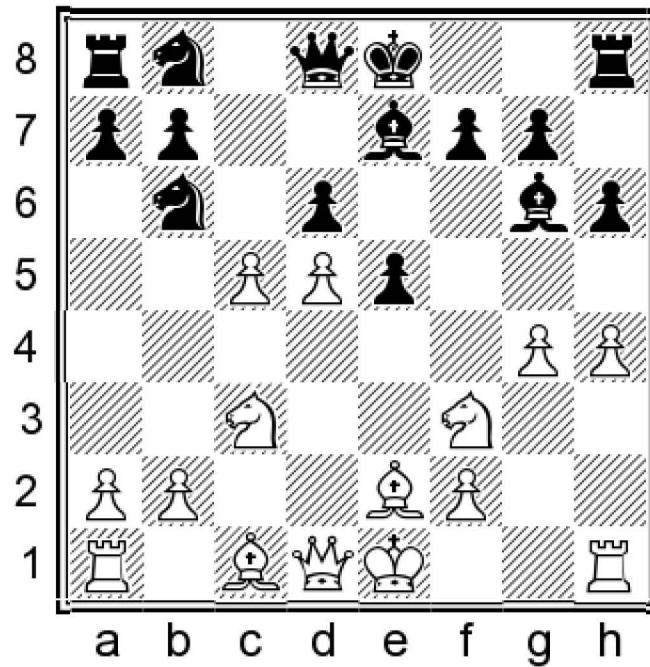


Position after: 15.Nd2

White holds a stable plus, the c4-pawn being immune due to Qa4+,
Bologan – Agdestein Yerevan 1996.

B2) 13.Be3 Na6 may be a bit slow.

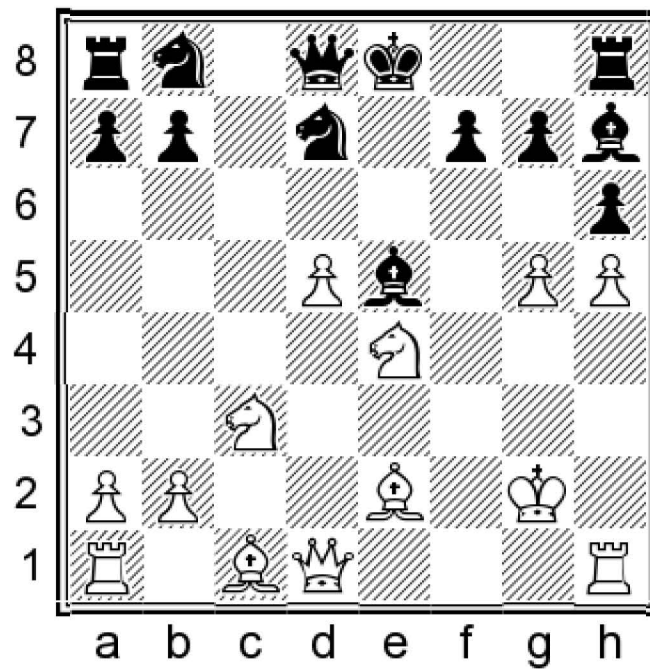
B3) Trying to rush things by means of 13.c5!? can lead to huge complications.



Position after: 13.c5!?

B2.1) 13...dxc5 14.Nxe5 Bh7 and now both 15.Bb5+ and 15.g5 need to be checked.

B2.2) 13...N6d7 14.cxd6 Bxd6 15.h5 Bh7 16.g5 e4 17.Nd2 e3 18.Nde4 [18.Nc4!? deserves attention too.] 18...exf2+ 19.Kxf2 [19.Kf1!?] 19...Be5 20.Kg2! with some edge for White according to the computer. [20.gxh6?! Gharamian, T (2657) – Appel, R (2526) Germany 2014 was less clear.]



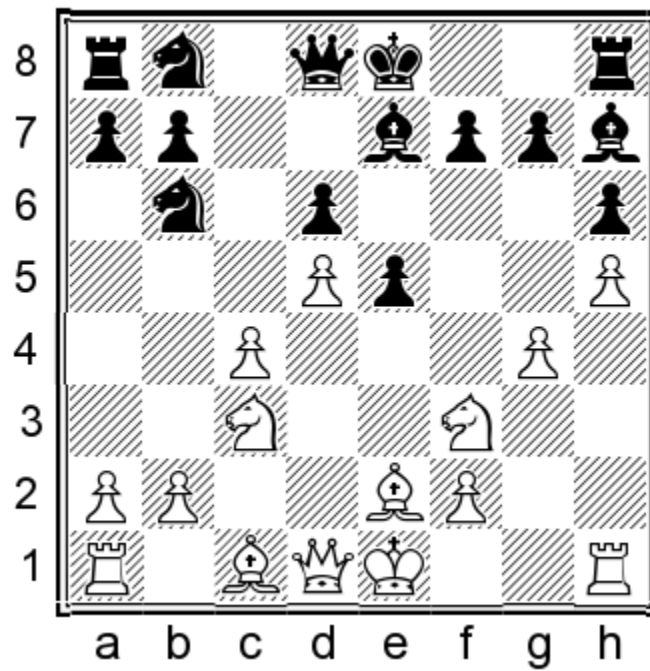
Position after: 20.Kg2!

It is funny that in other branches of the very same line White tries to set up a quiet positional bind whereas after 13.c5!? a complete mess appears on the board!

B2.3) 13...e4!? 14.cxb6 [14.Ne5!?] 14...exf3 15.Bb5+ [15.Bxf3!?]

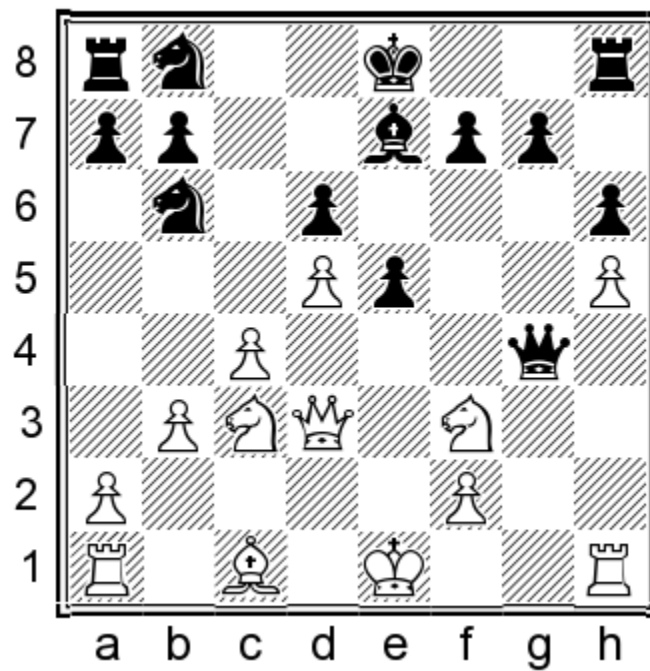
15...Nd7 16.bxa7∞ It is unclear whether White will be able to hang on to his booty, because the pawns on a7, f3 and h4 could all vanish soon, while at the end of the day he may have worries about his rather vulnerable king.

B3) 13.h5! Bh7



Position after: 13...Bh7

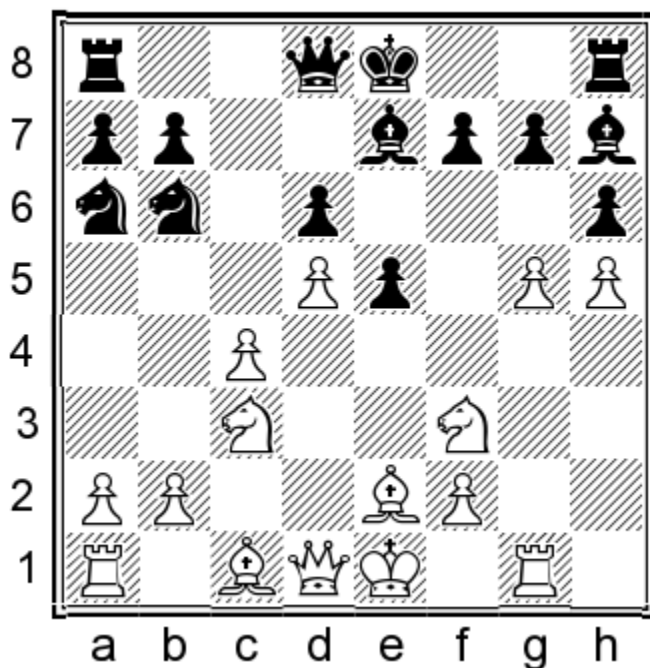
B3.1) 14.Bd3 Bxd3 15.Qxd3 Qc8?! [15...Na6 16.b3 Nd7 17.Be3 looks a bit better for White but anything can still happen.] 16.b3 Qxg4



Position after: 16...Qxg4

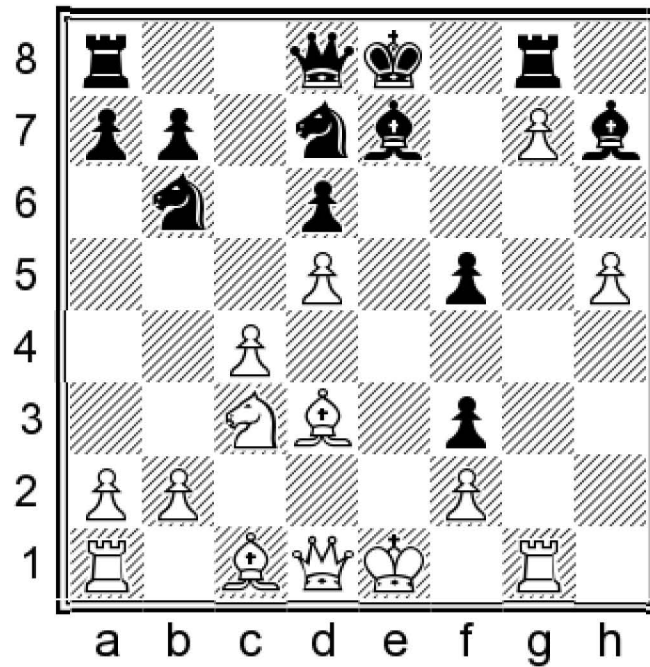
17.Ba3! Planning to evacuate the king to the queenside, and then possibly continue c4-c5 or Rdg1 is the most accurate way to proceed. [After 17.Rg1?!, the only move C&K indicate, 17...Qxh5 18.Rxg7 N8d7 ∞ when things are pretty unclear.] 17...N8d7 [On 17...f5?! the reply 18.Qe2! \pm is quite strong.] 18.0-0-0© White had more than enough compensation for his missing pawn in Talla, V (2432) – Plat, V (2284) Teplice 2007.

B3.2) 14.Rg1 N8d7! [14...Na6 15.g5 occurred in the recent game Garcia Martin, M (2335) – Vavulin, M (2561) Escaldes 2019,



Position after: 15.g5

where rather than 15...e4? 16.gxh6 gxh6 17.Nxe4 \pm , with the idea of 17...Bxe4 18.Qd4, Black should have tried 15...Bf5. The position would have remained difficult for him though.] 15.g5 e4 16.gxh6 exf3 [Rather than 16...gxh6?! 17.Nd4 which was better for White in Bratovic, B (2320) – Bulic, J (2259) Slovenia 2016.] 17.hxg7 Rg8 18.Bd3 f5

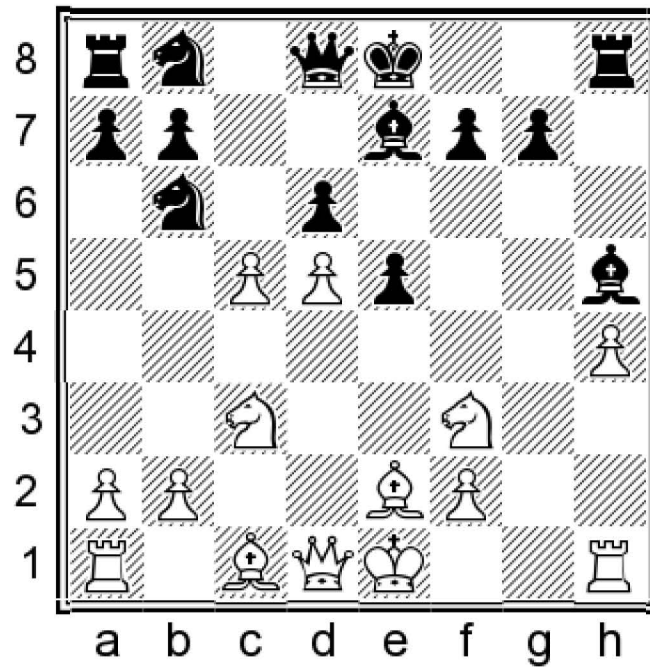


Position after: 18...f5

This position could be crucial for the assessment of 12...h6. The white passed pawns look scary, and the h7-bishop silly, but Black may survive.

13.g5

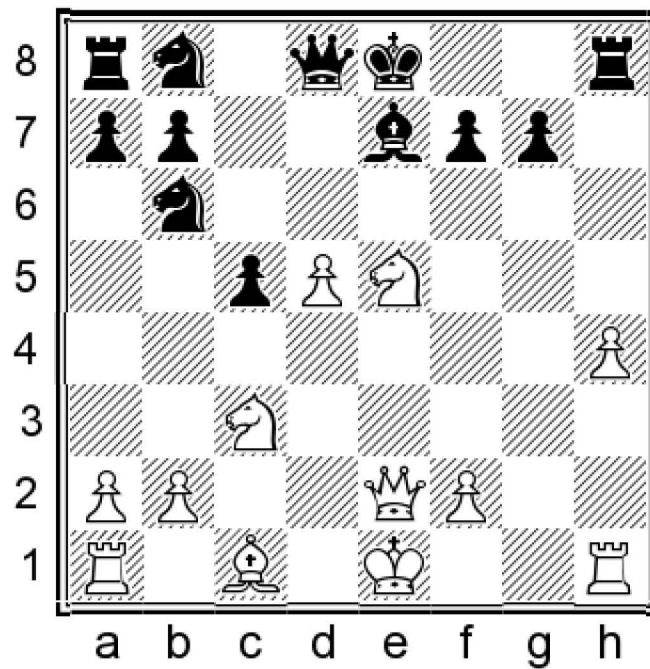
By going for 13.gxh5, White gives the game a completely different course.
13...Bxh5 14.c5



Position after: 14.c5

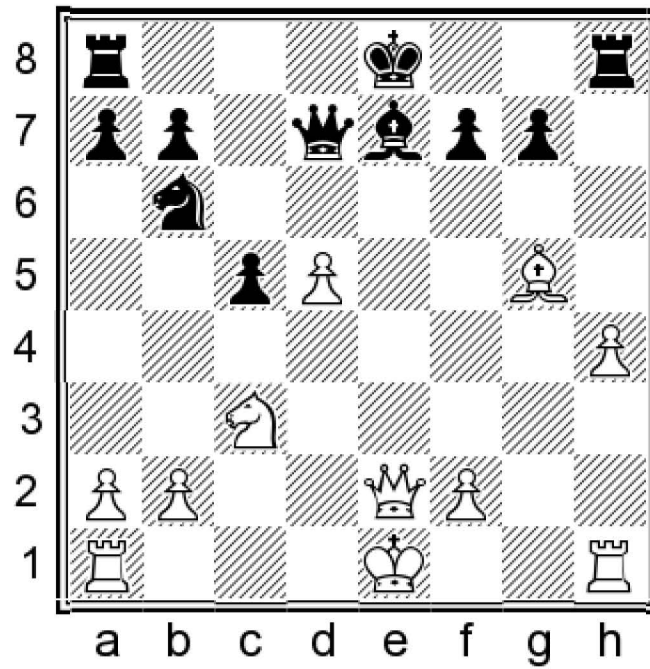
A) Black quickly experienced troubles with 14...N6d7?! in Robson, R (2680) – Yermolinsky, A (2515) Saint Louis 2015, which continued 15.cxd6 Bxd6 16.Ng5 Nf6?! [16...Bxe2 17.Qxe2 Bb4² was the lesser evil] 17.Bxh5 Nxb5 18.Qf3 Nf4 19.Bxf4 exf4 20.0-0-0± Nd7 21.Rhe1+ Kf8 22.Ne6+. Black is busted and decided to resign.

B) 14...dxc5! 15.Nxe5 N8d7 [15...Bxe2 16.Qxe2



Position after: 16.Qxe2

16...Nxd5 17.Qc4 is irritating for Black, and while 16...0-0 could turn out to be perilous, after 16...N8d7 it isn't clear whether White has anything better than to transpose into 15...N8d7.] 16.Nxd7 Bxe2 17.Qxe2 Qxd7 18.Bg5

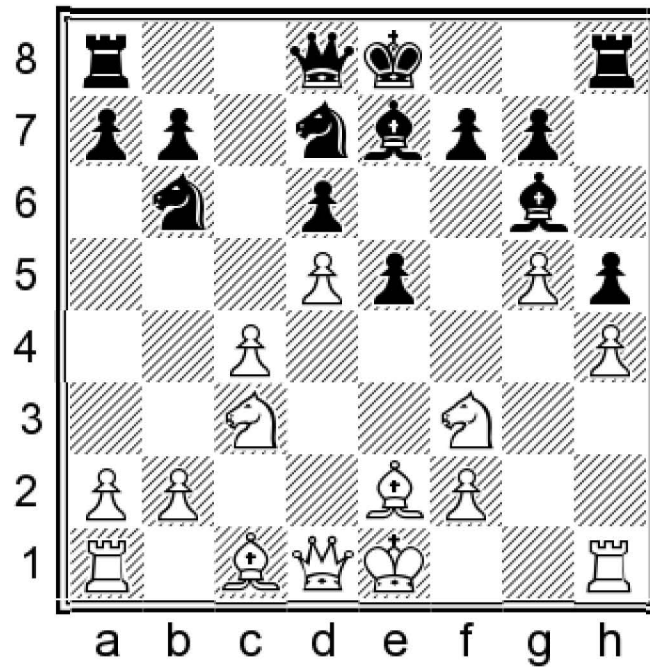


Position after: 18.Bg5

Black must now get rid of the pin. Following 18...f6 19.0-0-0 0-0-0 or perhaps even 19...fxg5 20.d6 Kf8 he looks alright to me.

13...Na6

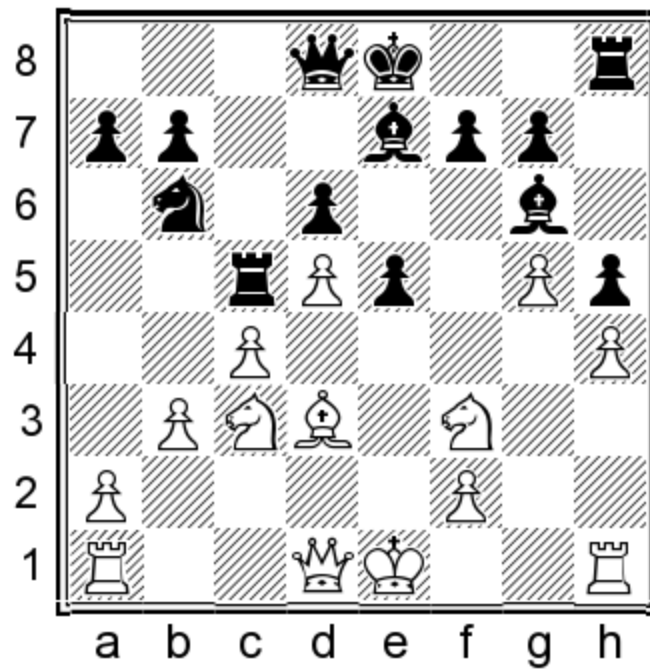
13...N8d7



Position after: 13...N8d7

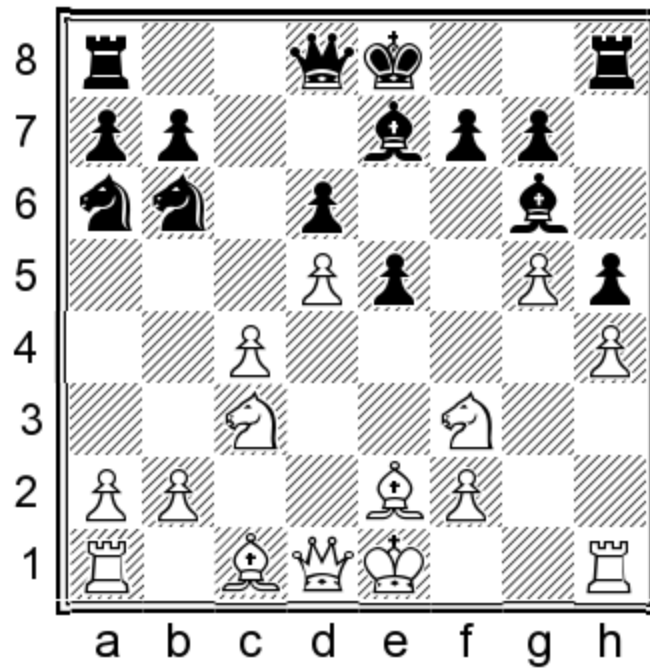
A) White should not rush with the exchange of the light-squared bishops. Indeed, after 14.Bd3?! 0-0 he can already forget about an opening advantage. 15.Be3 [Or 15.b3 when Black has a choice between ...Nc5 and the complex 15...f5!? 16.gxf6 e4∞.] 15...e4 16.Bxe4 Nxc4³ Mareco, S (2481) – Malbran, G (2247) Villa Martelli 2008.

B) 14.Be3! White holds a lasting edge in all lines after this move. 14...Rc8 [14...Bf5 15.Nd2± Chandra, A (2490) – Boros, D (2447) Atlantic City 2016; 14...a6 15.b3 Qc7 16.Bd3 0-0 17.Ne4² Vescovi, G – Leita, R Itabirito 1998] 15.b3 Nc5 16.Bxc5 Rxc5 17.Bd3 We reach this position through the move order 12.Be3. White has achieved his strategic goal, he has a firm grip on the e4-square, but sooner or later he will have to take on g6, opening the f-file for Black's counterplay.



Position after: 17.Bd3

Back to 13...Na6.



Position after: 13...Na6

14.Be3

14.Bd3 0-0! with a likely transposition into 12.Be3 (next subchapter)
[14...Bxd3?! 15.Qxd3 Rc8 16.b3 Nc5 17.Qe2² Popovic, D (2661) –
Cvetkovic, N (2308) Belgrade 2015].

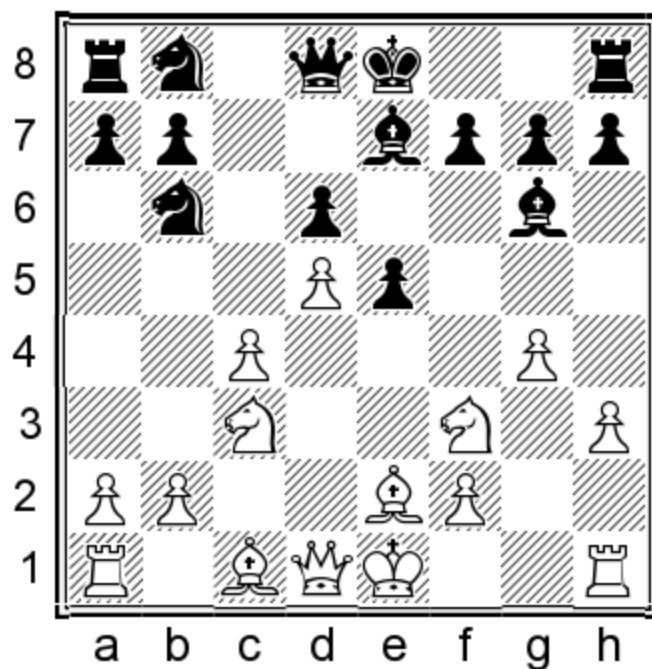
14...Rc8

Or 14...Nb4?! 15.Rc1.

See 12.Be3 Na6 13.h4 h5 and so on (next subchapter).

d) 7.exd6 cxd6 8.h3 Bh5 9.Nc3 Be7 10.d5 e5 11.g4 Bg6 12.Be3

**1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.Nf3 Bg4 5.Be2 e6 6.c4 Nb6 7.exd6 cxd6 8.h3
Bh5 9.Nc3 Be7 10.d5 e5 11.g4! Bg6**

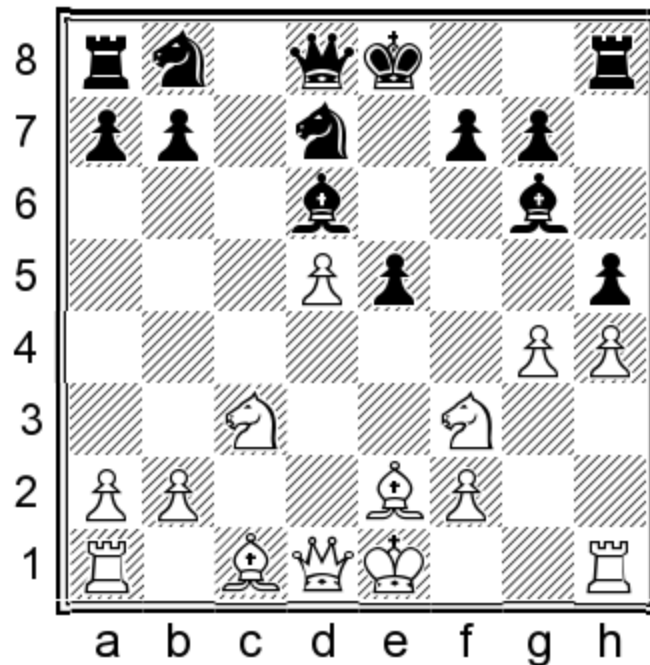


Position after: 11...Bg6

12.Be3

12.c5

A) 12...N6d7?! 13.cxd6 Bxd6 14.h4 h5



Position after: 14...h5

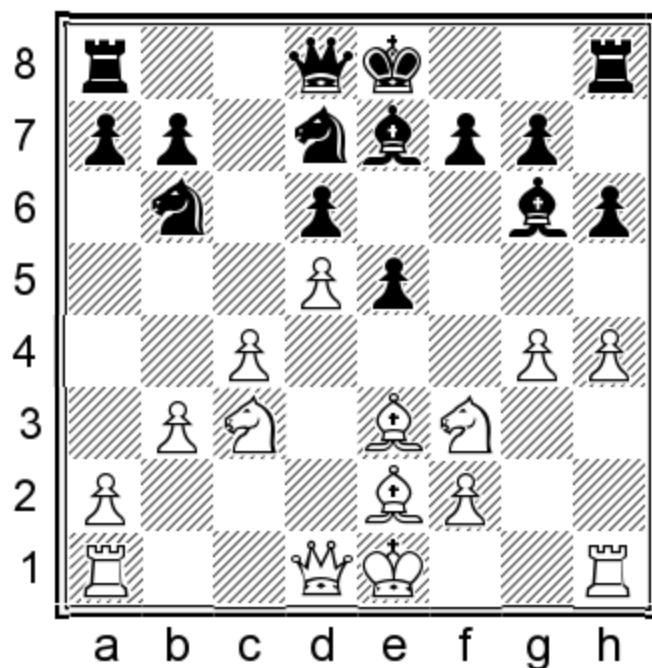
This happened in Solodovnichenko, Y (2571) – Shivananda, B (2347) Gurgon 2009, where rather than 15.g5?! Na6∞ White can at least transpose into Robson – Yermolinsky, seen under 12.h4 h5, by means of 15.gxh5 Bxh5 16.Ng5.

B) 12...dxc5! 13.Nxe5 and now either 13...N8d7 or 13...Bf6!? with reciprocal chances.

12...Na6

By playing 12...N8d7 Black blocks a potential Qa4+, ruling out the immediate 13.Bd3?! because of 13...e4!. White, however, preserves his edge in customary fashion. 13.h4! [13.c5?! leads to unclear complications:

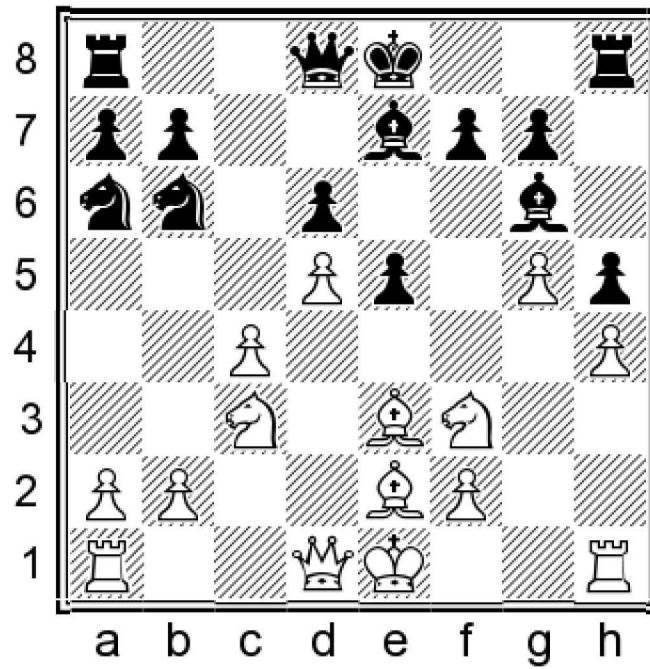
13...Nxc5 14.Bxc5 dxc5 15.Bb5+ Kf8 16.Nxe5 Bd6 17.Nxg6+ hxg6∞.]
 13...h6 [13...h5 – see 12.h4 h5.] 14.b3 [14.Nd2!? Bxh4 15.Nde4 Be7
 16.g5© Iordachescu, V (2553) – Socko, B (2630) playchess.com 2006.]



Position after: 14.b3

14...Nf6 [14...e4?! induces a trade of pawns ultimately favorable to White:
 15.Nd2 Nc5 16.Bxc5 dxc5 17.Ndxe4 Bxh4 18.Qd2± followed by 0-0-0;
 14...a6 15.Bd3 Bxd3 16.Qxd3± Zapata, A (2556) – Baburin, A (2580) Bled
 2002.] 15.h5 Bh7 16.g5 and now White obtains a pleasant edge with either
 16...Ng4 17.g6 fxg6 18.Bd3 or 16...hxg5 17.Nxg5 Bf5 18.Qd2.

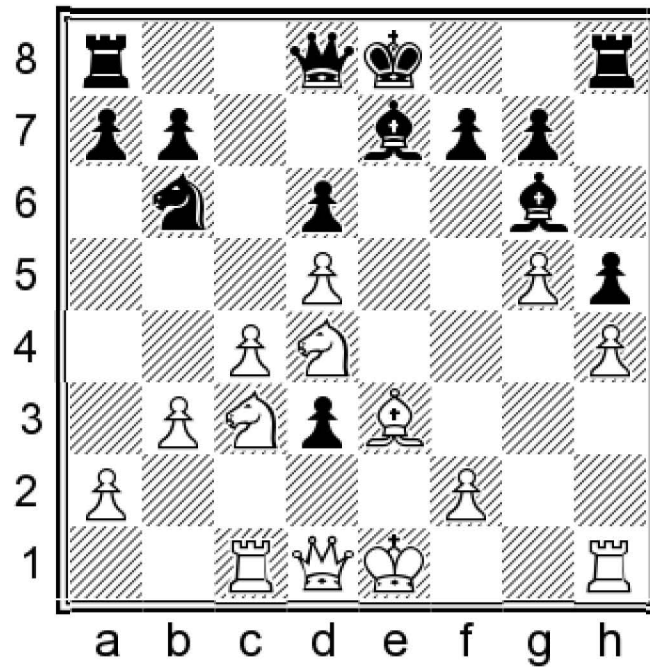
13.h4 h5 14.g5



Position after: 14.g5

14...Rc8

14...Nb4?! 15.Rc1! e4?! 16.Nd4 Nd3+ [16...Nd7 17.a3 Nd3+ 18.Bxd3 exd3 19.f4±] 17.Bxd3 exd3 18.b3±



Position after: 18.b3±

In the long run Black will lose his d3-pawn.

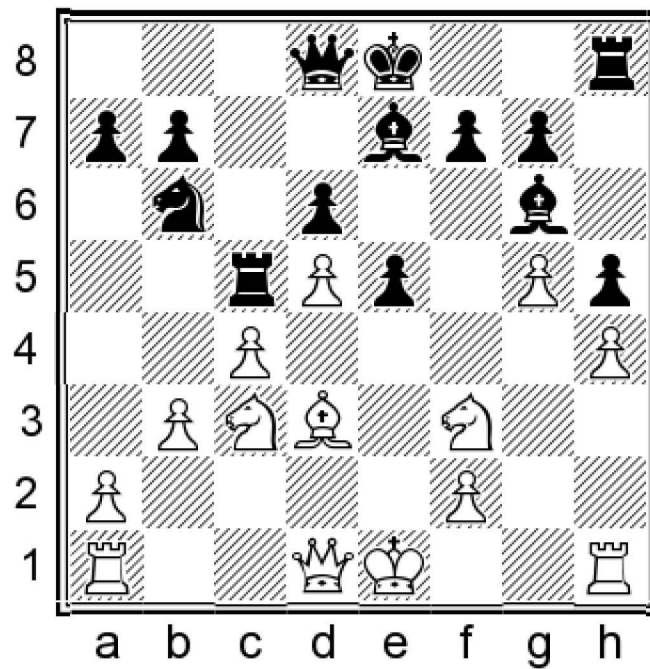
15.b3 Nc5

15...Nd7?! seems inferior due to 16.a3 and now after either 16...0-0 or 16...Nac5 White plays 17.Nd2².

16.Bxc5

Obviously not forced; White can also try 16.Nd2 for instance.

16...Rxc5 17.Bd3



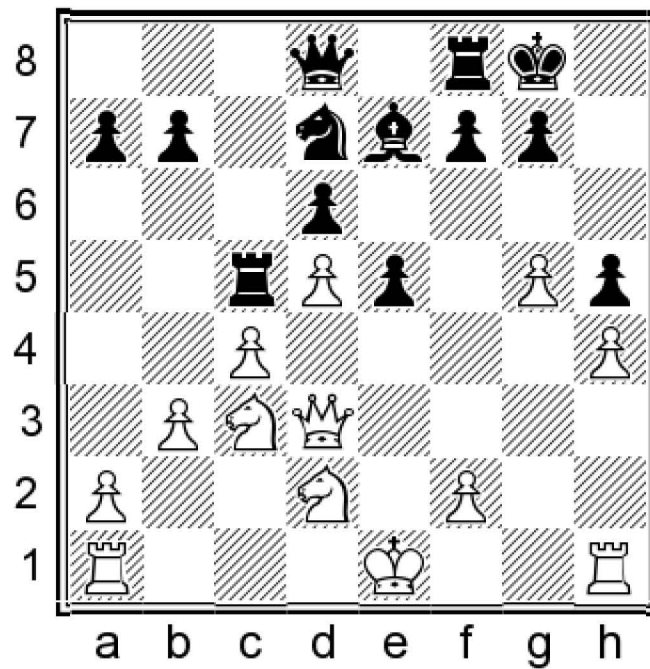
Position after: 17.Bd3

17...0-0!

Curiously, I failed to find any game with this refinement over 17...Bxd3?! 18.Qxd3.

A) 18...g6?! from Tishin, P (2420) – Moiseev, A (2360) Tula 2016 is no improvement since 19.Ne4!± followed by c4-c5 would have been even stronger than the game continuation 19.0-0-0?!². The knight retreat 18...Nd7, in order to speed up counterplay with ...a6 and ...b5, could be more to the point.

B) 18...0-0 19.Nd2 Nd7



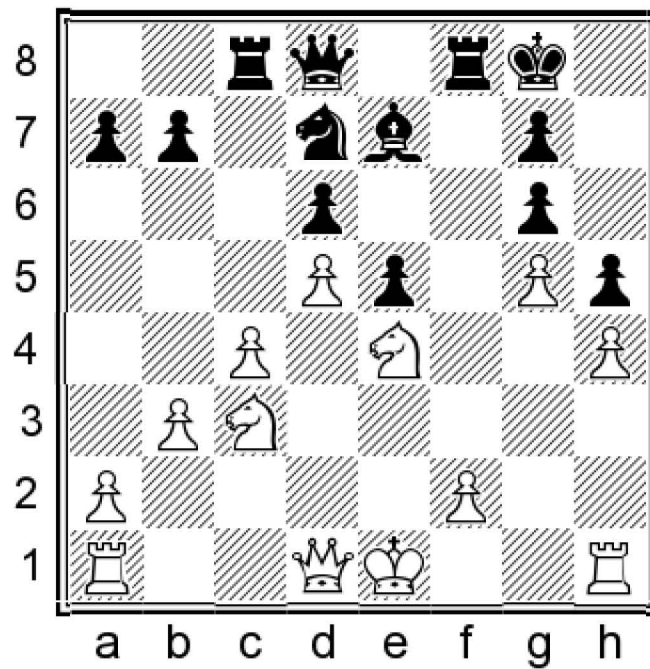
Position after: 19...Nd7

This position arose in Hovhannisyan, R (2624) – Mikaelyan, A (2448) Yerevan 2016, where rather than 20.g6?! (20...Rc8!) White should have gone for either 20.Qe2 g6 21.Nde4 or 20.Nde4 Rc8 21.0-0-0, with a sizeable edge in both cases.

18.Bxg6 fxg6 19.Nd2

Or 19.Qd3 Nd7 with an unclear game ahead of us.

19...Nd7 20.Nde4 Rc8



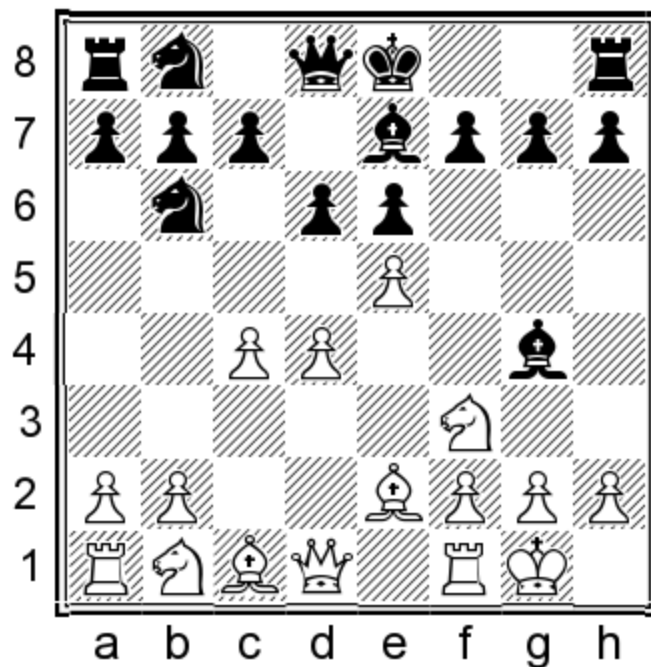
Position after: 20...Rc8

Black can follow up with ...Rf4, and possibly ...a6, ...b5, ...Nc5 and/or ...Qf8-f5. White is seemingly in control but where should he hide his king?

Conclusion: The line 10.d5 e5 11.g4 is critical because it can lead to some sharp struggles or to a positional battle where Black might lack counterplay. A key idea in the main line is to let White himself trade the light-squared bishops on g6 rather than take on d3. True, this worsens the black pawn structure, but his potential counterplay along the f-file is worth more.

e) 7.0-0 with 10.Be3 --

1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.Nf3 Bg4 5.Be2 e6 6.c4 Nb6 7.0-0 Be7

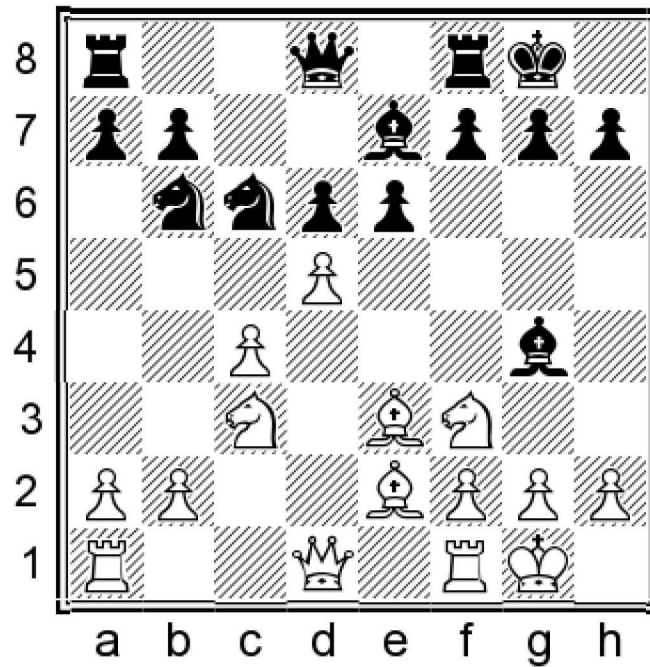


Position after: 7...Be7

8.h3

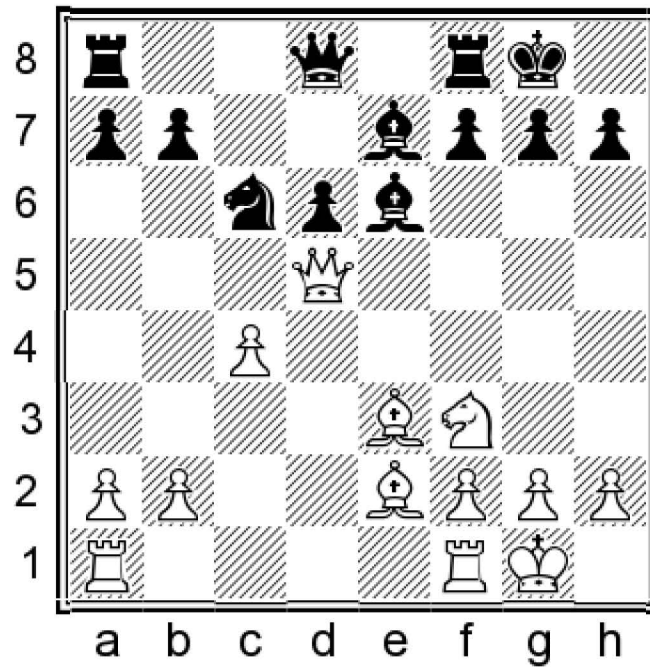
White would prefer to do without inserting the move pair 8.h3 Bh5 if Black carries on in the same vein as in the main line. Indeed, in the position after 12.gxf3, White wished he could use the h3 square for his queen in some variations (I won't go into more details since 4...Bg4 is not my recommendation). We will, however, see the nuance that makes 8.h3 (or 9.h3) the most accurate move.

8.Nc3 0-0 9.Be3 Nc6 [9...N8d7²] 10.exd6 cxd6 11.d5



Position after: 11.d5

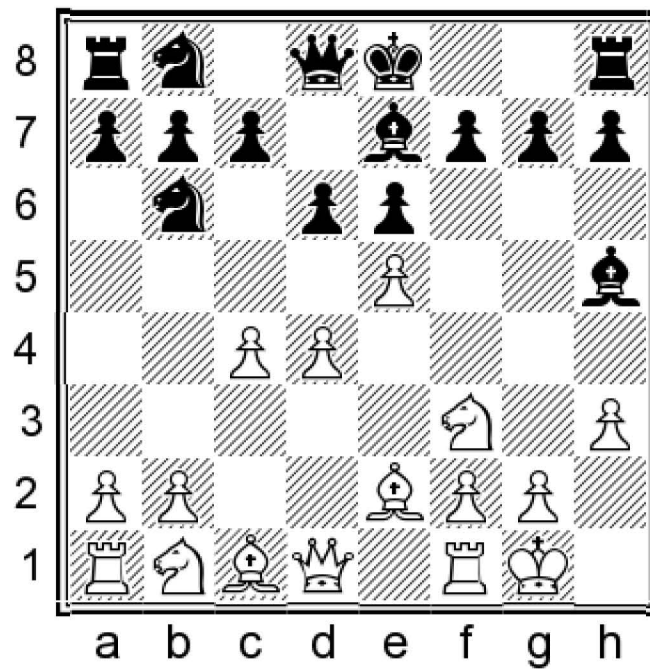
11...exd5 [if 11...Bxf3 then 12.Bxf3 Ne5 13.dxe6 fxe6 14.Bg4! followed by b2-b3 offers White a lasting edge] 12.Nxd5 [12.cxd5 Bxf3 13.Bxf3 Ne5 Is quite acceptable for Black] 12...Nxd5 13.Qxd5 [13.cxd5 Bxf3 14.Bxf3 Ne5 – see 12.cxd5. A set of knights has been traded but this doesn't make a huge difference. White may be marginally better, but not more.] 13...Be6



Position after: 13...Be6

14.Qd2 [14.Qb5 and 14.Qh5 Bf6 15.Rad1 are also slightly in White's favor]
 14...d5 15.c5 Rc8 16.b4 and White is a bit better; Sutovsky, E – Berkes, F
 Pcs 2005.

8...Bh5

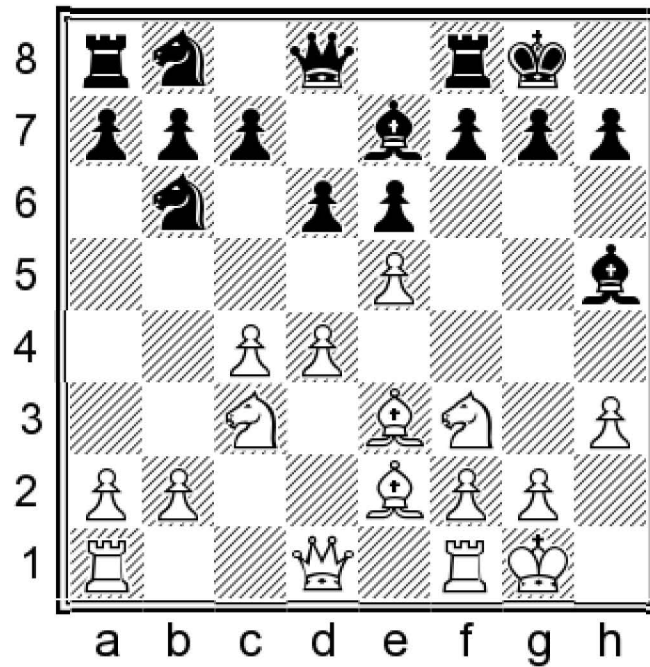


Position after: 8...Bh5

9.Nc3

Although the trade ...dxe5 is hardly a threat, 9.exd6 cxd6 followed by 10.Nc3 or even 10.Be3 or 10.Nbd2 shouldn't compromise White's chances of getting an opening edge.

9...0-0 10.Be3

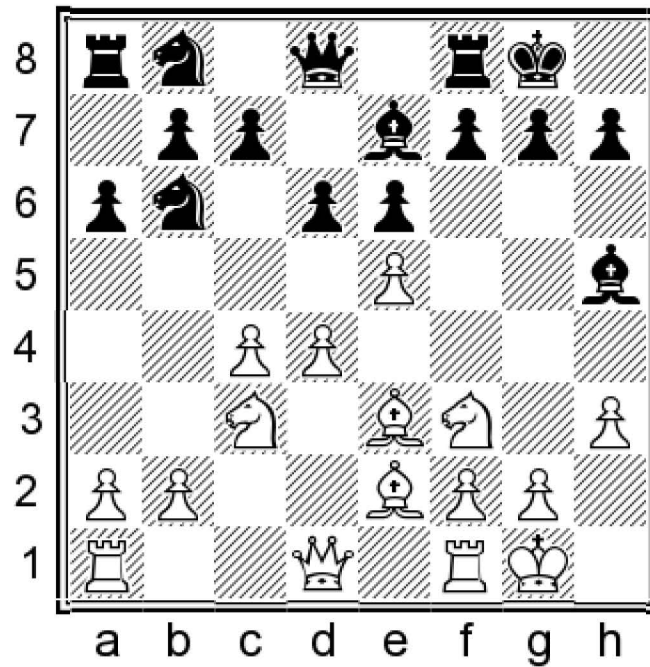


Position after: 10.Be3

We have arrived at a crossroads where Black's main line starts with 10...d5. In this subchapter I will say a few words about secondary variations.

10...N8d7

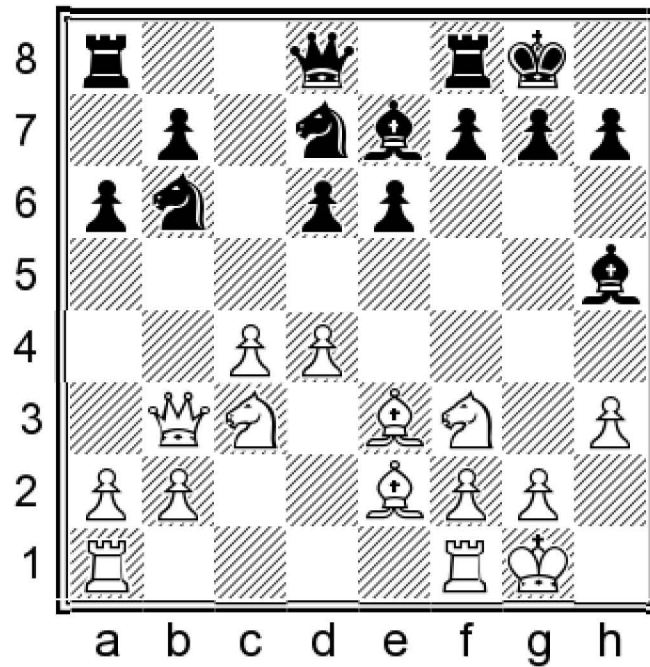
A) 10...a6 Pushing the a-pawn has a double purpose: (1) Black vacates the a7-square for his rook, rendering the threat of ...Bxf3 Bxf3 ...Nxc4 effective and (2) it is a sort of prophylaxis against the b4-b5 push, in the event of the likely scenario ...d6-d5 c4-c5 ...N6d7 (or ...Nc8).



Position after: 10...a6

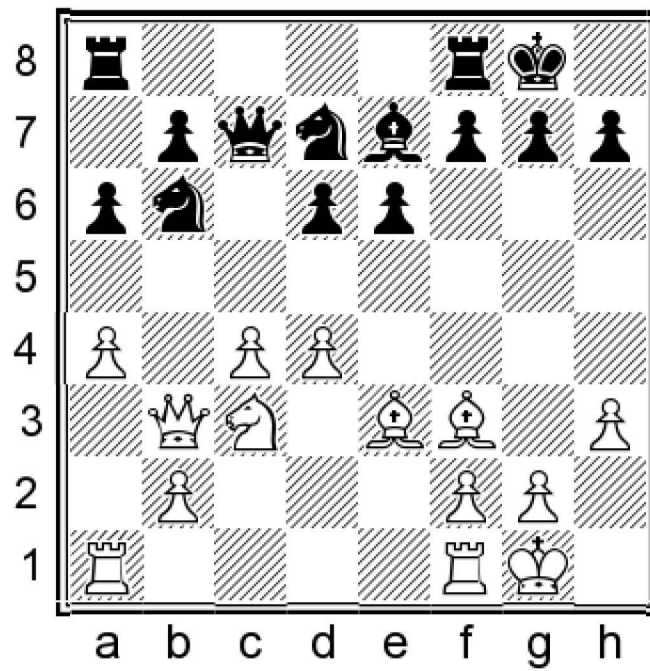
Practice has, however, shown that the unstable knight on b6 causes Black some headaches after 11.exd6!, but White remains better if he simply relies on his space advantage by means of 11.b3. Let's take a look at both options.

A1) 11.exd6! The most direct approach. 11...cxd6 12.Qb3 N8d7



Position after: 12...N8d7

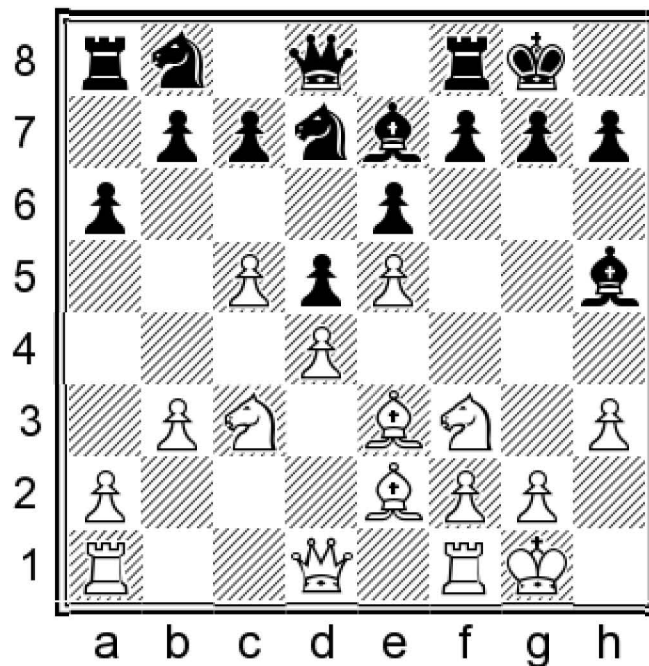
13.a4 [More ambitious than 13.Rac1 Rc8 14.Nd2 Bxe2 15.Nxe2, as in the rapid game Anand, V (2715) – Morozevich, A (2605) Moscow 1995, where the white advantage is not as marked in my view.] 13...Bxf3 [13...Qc7?! is worse: 14.a5 Nc8 15.Rfc1 Na7 16.d5± Bauer, C (2623) – Ehlvest, J (2535) Berlin (blitz) 2015.] 14.Bxf3 [14.gxf3 Rb8 Hoepfl, T (2313) – Tischbierek, R (2466) Osterburg 2006 may also be a tad better for White, but at least Black has inflicted some structural damage.] 14...Qc7



Position after: 14...Qc7

15.c5! dxc5 16.a5 cxd4 17.Bxd4 [17.axb6? Qe5=] 17...Nc4 18.Qxb7
White is on top.

A2) 11.b3 d5 12.c5 N6d7



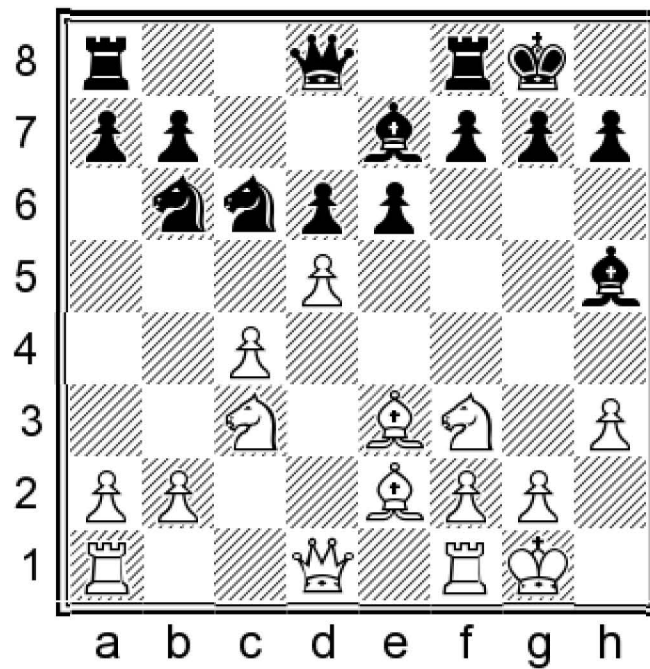
Position after: 12...N6d7

13.b4 [13.Ne1 Bg6 14.Bd3 Nc6 15.Ne2² Korneev, O (2547) – Kabanov, N (2484) Kazan 2018. Despite his space advantage, White insisted on trading his opponent's light-squared "bad" (in fact good here!) bishop. His knight retreat freed his f-pawn to advance, an important aspect.]

13...Nc6 14.Qb3 Bxf3 15.Bxf3 Bg5² The correspondence game Rittner, H (2595) – Pizzuto, S (2545) Italy 1995 reached this position.

B) 10...a5 is very similar to 10...a6, with the notable difference that White may use the weakened b5-square in some cases, e.g. 11.exd6 cxd6 12.Qb3 a4? 13.Qb5!±.

C) In the event of 10...Nc6 the well-known path to a lasting white edge is 11.exd6 cxd6 12.d5!.



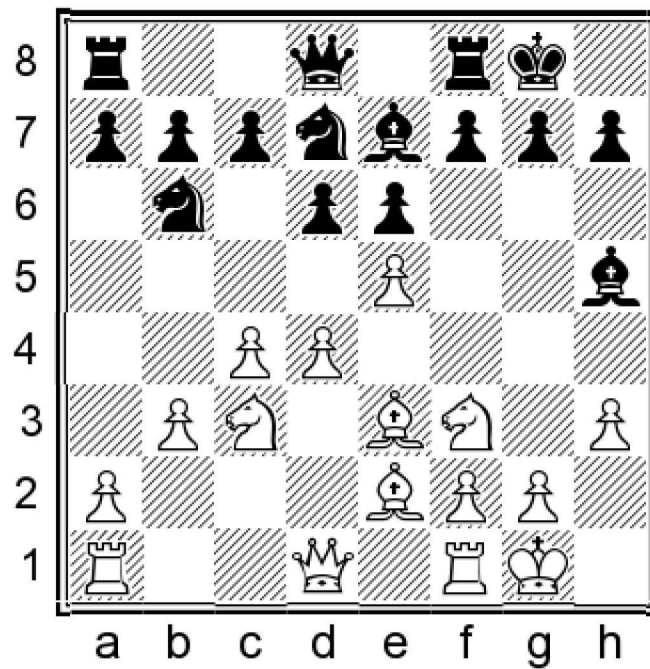
Position after: 12.d5!

After either 12...exd5 13.Nxd5² or 12...Bxf3 13.Bxf3 Ne5 14.dxe6 fxe6 15.Bg4² Black has nothing in return for his inferior pawn structure.

11.b3

Black has tried several moves here but the common feature is that he will get a somewhat cramped game where he needs patience and some care to hope for an eventual equalization.

11.exd6 cxd6 12.b3² Is also good, but since the exchange ...dxe5 is not to be feared White doesn't need to clarify the central situation yet.

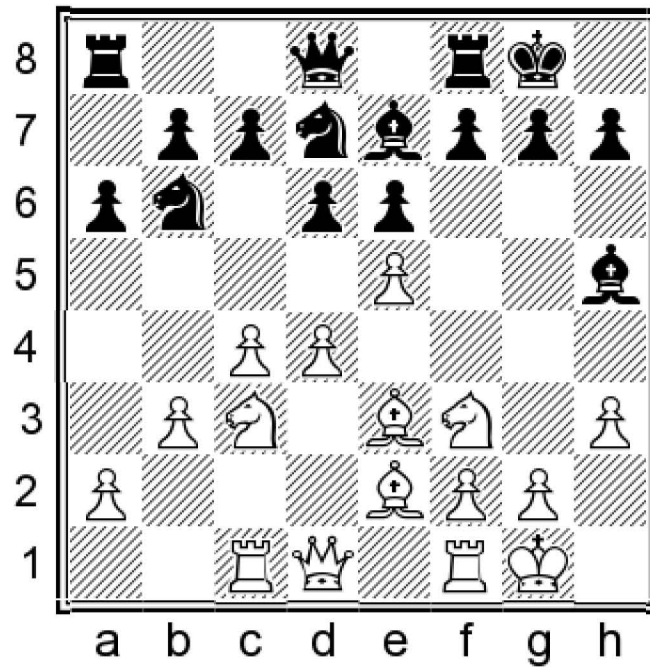


Position after: 11.b3

11...Bg6

A) 11...dxe5 12.Nxe5 Bxe2 13.Qxe2² Chiburdanidze, M (2220) – Ubilava, E (2410) Tbilisi 1976. Once again, White has more space.

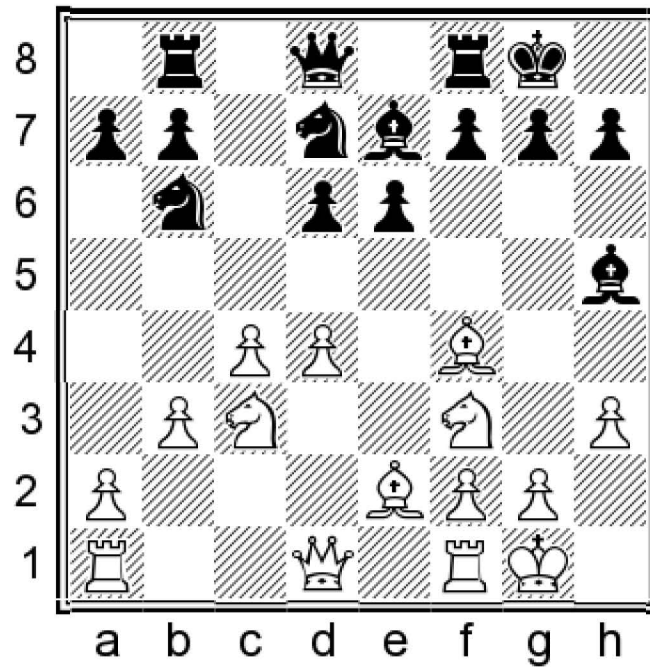
B) 11...a6 12.Rc1



Position after: 12.Rc1

In his annotations for ChessBase GM Finkel assigns 12...Bxf3 a “?!” mark, suggesting that Black should instead opt for 12...dxe5 13.Nxe5 Bxe2 14.Qxe2 Nxe5 15.dxe5 Nd7, as in Chandler, M – Appel, R Germany 1998. The position would then be the same as in the 11...dxe5 variation, except that the insertion of ...a6 and Rc1 could marginally favor Black. It isn’t, however, clear to me which position is worse/easier to defend from the black perspective. 13.Bxf3 dxe5 14.Bxb7 exd4 15.Bxd4 c5 16.Be3 Ra7 17.Bf3² Aseev, K (2579) – Tomashevsky, E (2452) Ekaterinburg 2002.

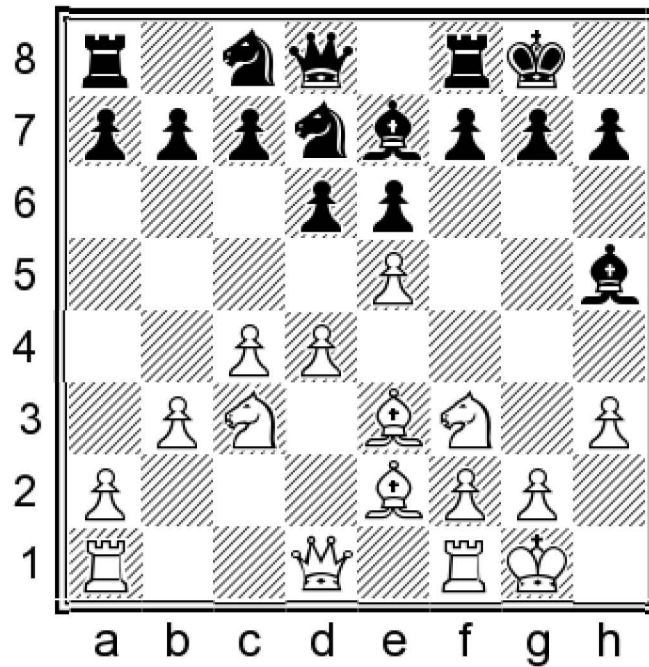
C) 11...Rb8!? Black wants to incite the exchange exd6 ...cxd6, relying on the closed character of the game to allow him time for this passive move. 12.exd6 cxd6 13.Bf4



Position after: 13.Bf4

13...Nf6 [13...Nc8 14.Re1 Re8 15.Rc1 Bxf3 16.Bxf3 Bg5 17.Bxg5 Qxg5 18.b4² Yumakhuzhin, V (2228) – Nugumanov, B (2391) Cheliabinsk 2018. White enjoys his customary space advantage and the black cavalry doesn't impress.] 14.a4 a6 15.a5 Nbd7 16.Re1² Sutovsky, E (2607) – Zilberman, Y (2460) Ashdod 2006.

D) The cumbersome 11...Nc8 was employed successfully in the next two correspondence games.

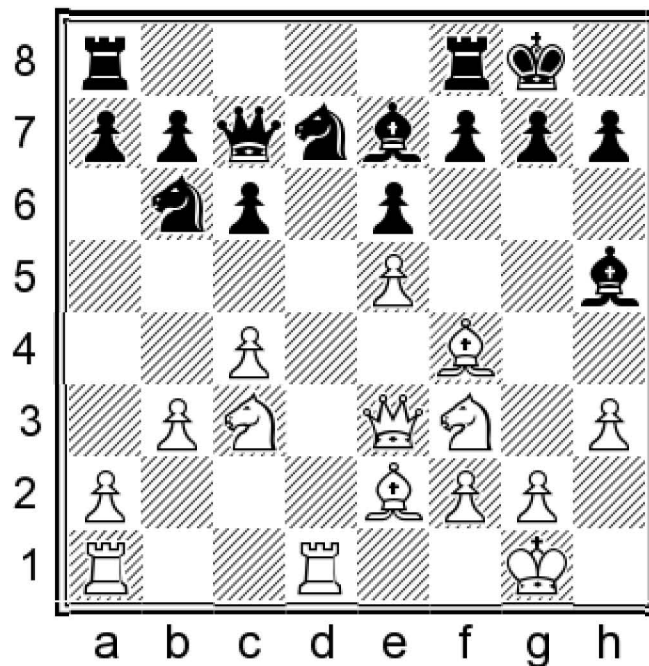


Position after: 11...Nc8

Obviously, it doesn't alter the evaluation of the position.

D1) 12.Bf4 c6 13.Qc2 Bxf3 14.Bxf3 dxe5 15.dxe5 Qa5 16.Rfe1 Bb4 17.Re3 Ne7 18.Be4 f5 19.exf6 Nxf6∞ Odeeva, K (2259) – Schmidt, L (2393) ICCF email 2015. White needs to find an improvement earlier on since the black activity along the f-file combined with a possible ...Bc5 provides good counterplay.

D2) 12.Qd2 c6 13.Rfd1 dxe5 14.dxe5 Ncb6 15.Bf4 Qc7 16.Qe3²



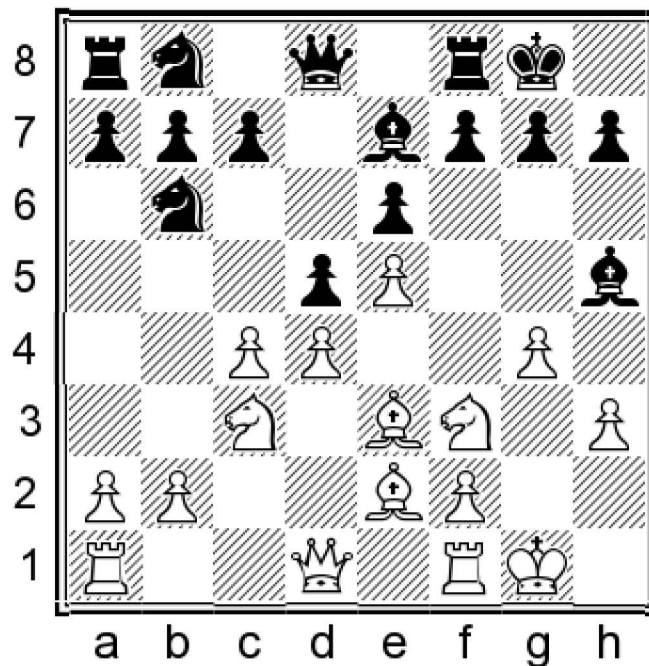
Position after: 16.Qe3²

Cintins, I (2317) – Schmidt, L (2399) ICCF email 2015.

Conclusion: Moves other than 10...d5 remain rather unexplored but the overall tendency is crystal-clear: they don't challenge White's opening edge based on his spatial advantage. Although Black gets playable positions these are usually a bit passive and the eventual small improvements he may find can't call that verdict in question.

f) 7.0-0 with 10.Be3 d5 11.g4

1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.Nf3 Bg4 5.Be2 e6 6.c4 Nb6 7.0-0 Be7 8.Nc3 0-0 9.h3 Bh5 10.Be3 d5 11.g4!?



Position after: 11.g4!?

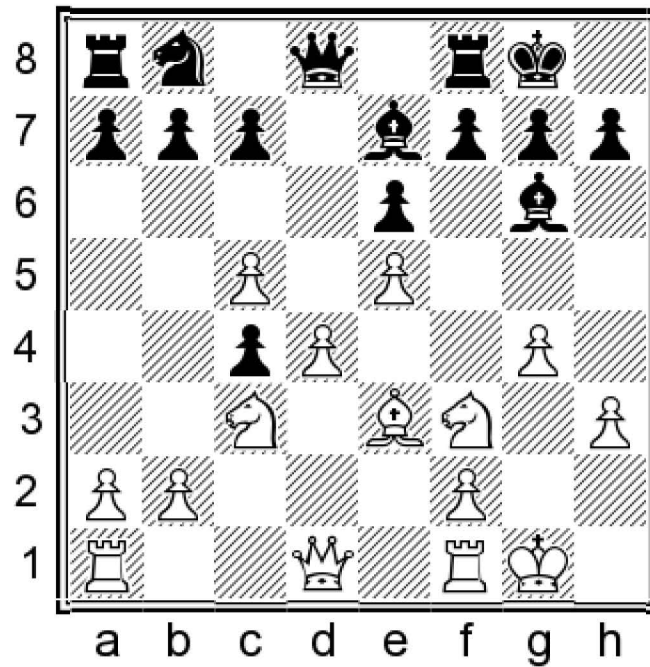
Astonishing as it may seem, this move was a novelty two years ago.

The reason is probably that, from a theoretical point of view, White doesn't need to have recourse to this somewhat weakening push (although, for the moment, Black is miles away from being able to create any sort of threats against the enemy king) in order to get an opening edge.

11...Bg6 12.c5 Nc4

Black will likely lose a pawn but in return he will be left with a powerful and unchallenged light-squared bishop. On the other hand, while going for the c4-pawn means the white queen has to leave her somewhat vulnerable king "alone", it remains hard for Black to launch a fierce attack on the kingside. In addition, the d4-d5 push is on White's agenda.

13.Bxc4 dxc4



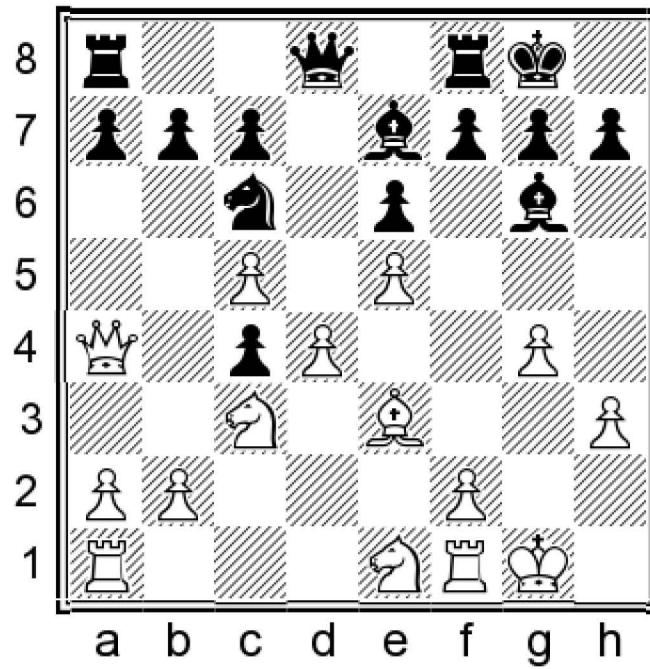
Position after: 13...dxc4

14.Qa4

The most straightforward.

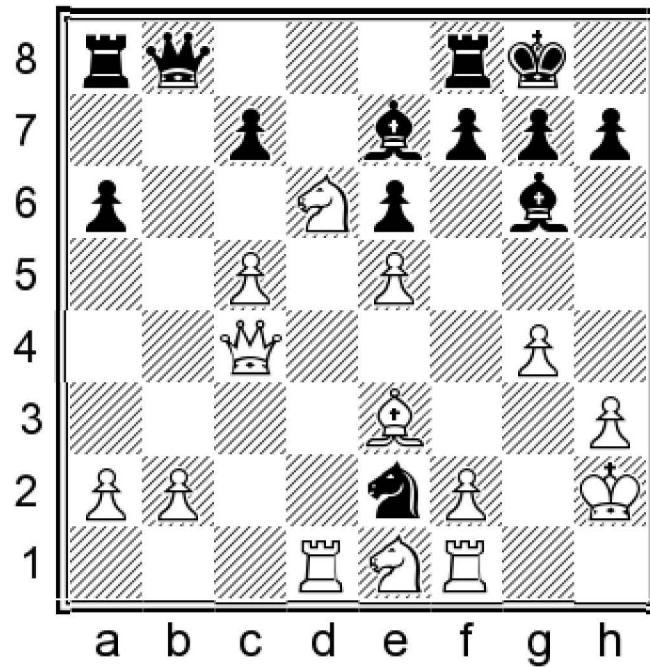
White could also have tried 14.Ne1!?, in order to free his f-pawn and avoid the resource ...Bd3.

A) 14...Nc6 15.Qa4



Position after: 15.Qa4

A1) 15...Nxd4?! seems to be a gross blunder but things are by far not so easy. 16.Rd1 b5!! [not 16...Bxc5?? 17.Qxc4+–] 17.Nxb5 [17.cxb6?! c5! ∞] 17...Ne2+ 18.Kh2 Qb8 19.Qxc4 a6 20.Nd6!

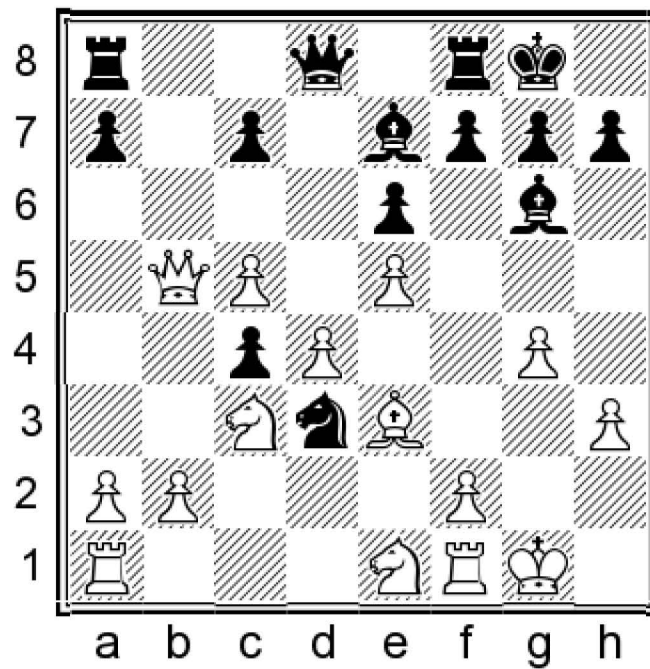


Position after: 20.Nd6!

The most ambitious, since after a different knight move Black would get nice compensation for his sacrificed pawn. White wants a big passed pawn on d6, reckoning that the horse on e2 will perish anyway. 20...Qxb2 21.Nf3 The threat is 22.Rd2 and White can claim a sizeable plus, according to the engine.

A2) 15...Qd7 16.Qxc4 b5!? However White takes, Black will continue ...Rfb8 and ...a6 and get good counterplay.

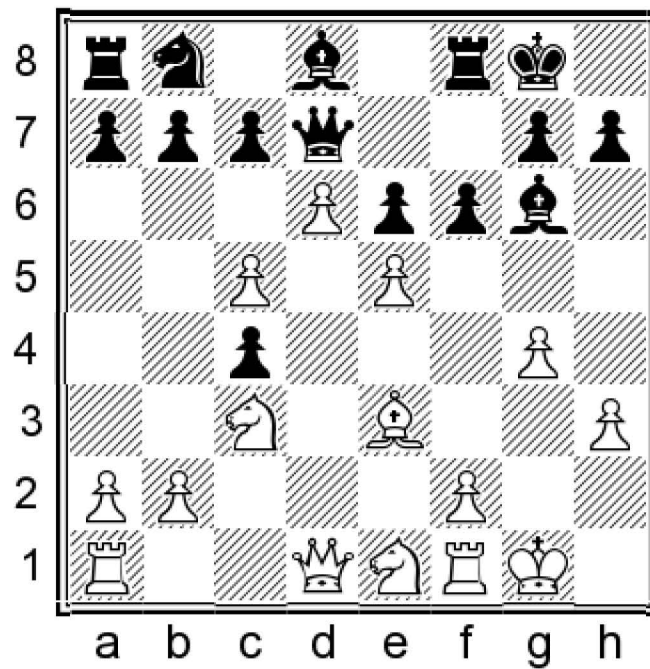
B) 14...b5 15.Qf3 Na6 [15...c6? 16.Nxb5±] 16.Qc6 Nb4 17.Qxb5 Nd3



Position after: 17...Nd3

18.b3 Nb2 19.Qa6 White looks a bit better, whereas 18.Qxc4 Nxb2 19.Qe2 Rb8© could be enough compensation so long as 20.f4 is not too nasty.

C) 14...Qd7! This looks objectively best, even though Black has two interesting alternatives in the form of 14...Nc6 and 14...b5. For example, 15.d5 f6 16.d6 Bd8∞.

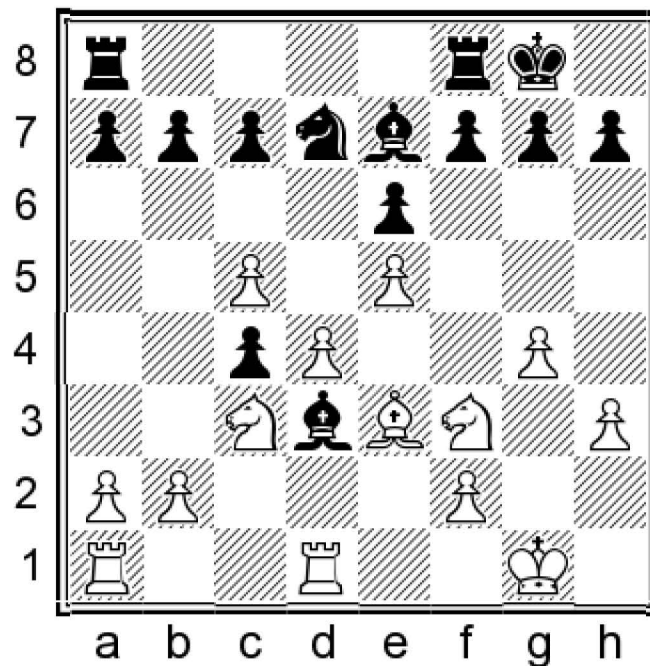


Position after: 16...Bd8

Not a very common middlegame picture! One thing is for sure, Black undoubtedly has managed to lure the enemy pawns forward, in the true Alekhine spirit, and will have his share of the cake in this complex position.

14...b6?

14...Bd3! would have maintained the balance, as the following lines show:
15.Rfd1 Qd7 16.Qxd7 Nxd7

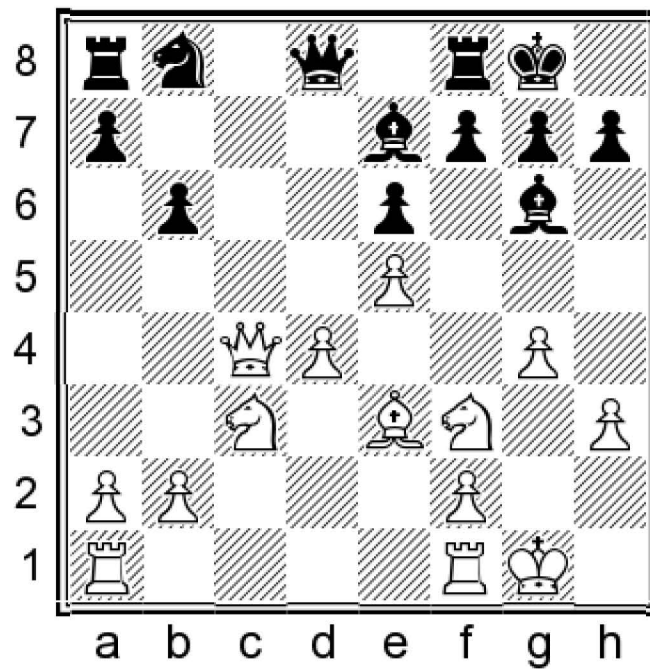


Position after: 16...Nxd7

A) 17.Ne1 Bg6 18.Nb5 Rfc8 19.Rac1 b6,, 20.c6 Nb8 21.d5 exd5 [But not 21.Rxc4?! a6 22.Na3 Be4³.] This roughly equal ending arose in Anand, V (2773) – Maghsoodloo, P (2688) St Petersburg (blitz) 2018. The c6-pawn will fall. Naturally, finding all the best moves in this tricky ending is a pretty difficult task. Maghsoodloo certainly considered 14...Bd3, but in a blitz game it is quite difficult to properly assess the consequences of such a move.

B) Or 17.b3 b6 18.c6 Bb4 [18...Nb8 seems decent too: 19.d5 Bb4 20.Nb5 exd5∞] 19.Nb5 Be2 or 19.bxc4 Bxc3 20.Rxd3 Bxa1 21.cxd7 Now a possible finish is 21...Rad8 22.a4 Rxd7 23.Ra3 Bb2 24.Rb3 Ba1=.

15.cxb6 cxb6 16.Qxc4±



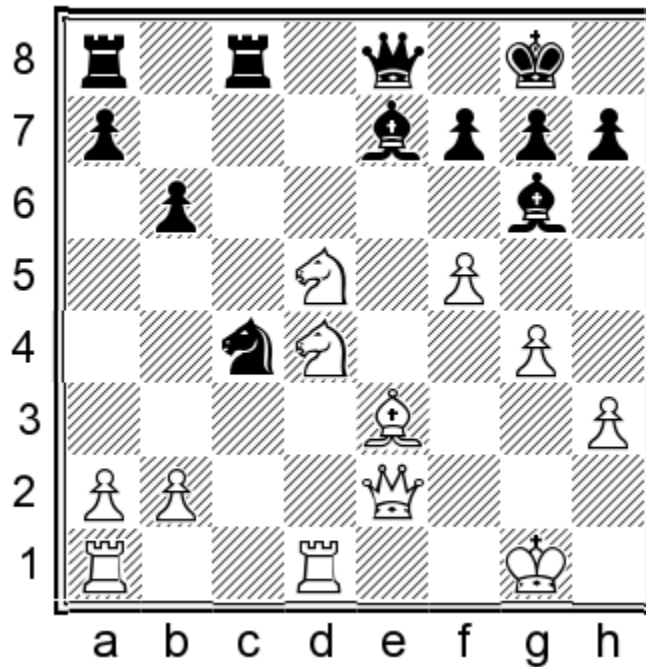
Position after: 16.Qxc4±

16...Qd7 17.d5! Rc8 18.Qe2 exd5 19.Rfd1 Nc6 20.Nxd5 Qe8 21.Nd4?!

21.Ne1! intending to unleash the f-pawn, as in the game, was the correct way to proceed.

21...Nxe5?

Black had to try 21...Nxd4 22.Bxd4 Rc2 23.Nxe7+ Qxe7 24.Qf3. White is up a pawn and his bishop will be stable on c3, but the conversion of the advantage won't be easy.



22.f4 Nc4 23.f5+–

Position after: 23.f5+– There is no trick along the e-file and White will soon be a piece up.

**23...Nxe3 24.Qxe3 Bc5 25.Qxe8+ Rxe8 26.Nc7 Bxf5 27.gxf5 Re4
28.Nxa8 Bxd4+ 29.Kh1 g6 30.fxg6 hxg6 31.Rd2**

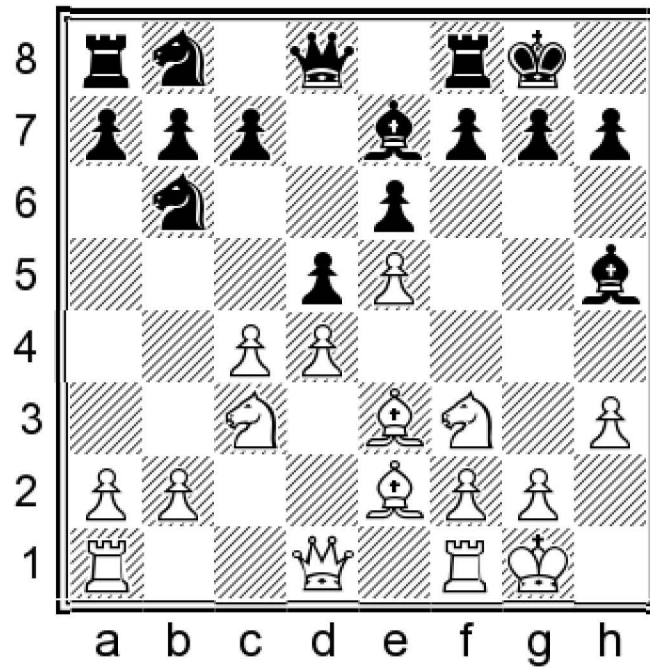
And Black resigned.

1-0 Anand,V (2773) – Maghsoodloo,P (2688) St Petersburg (blitz) 2018

The surprising 11.g4!? worked pretty well for Anand in this particular game, mostly because it was a novelty in a blitz game. Albeit an interesting option, pushing the g-pawn is certainly not the safest continuation at White's disposal.

g) 7.0-0 with 10.Be3 d5 11.b3, 11.cxd5

**1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.Nf3 Bg4 5.Be2 e6 6.c4 Nb6 7.0-0 Be7 8.Nc3
0-0 9.h3 Bh5 10.Be3 d5**

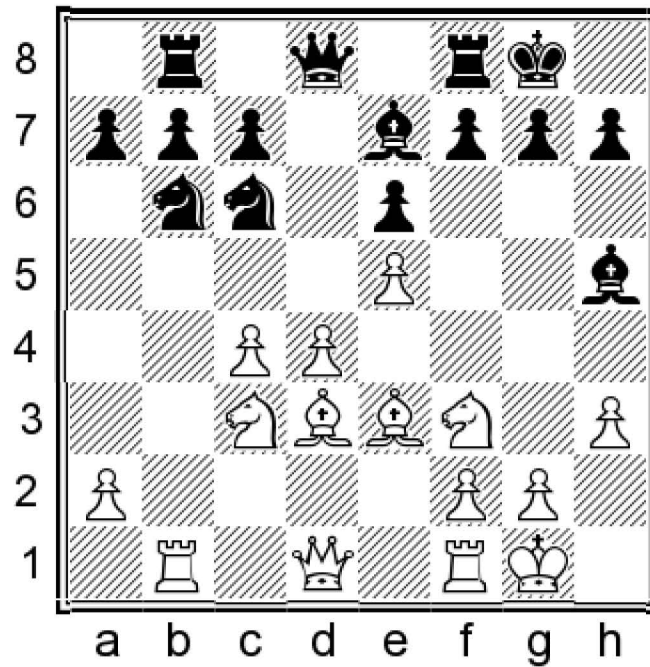


Position after: 10...d5

11.cxd5!?

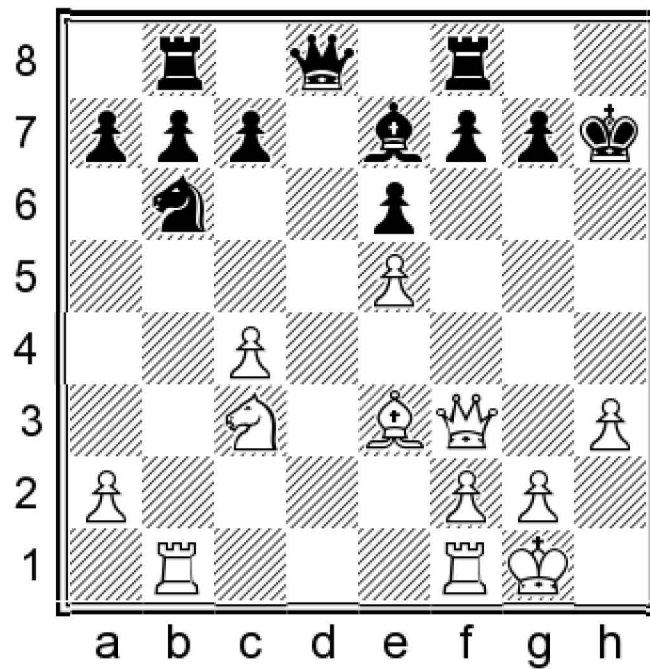
White is by no means forced to release the tension and the rare 11.b3!? may well be sufficient to give him an edge. He has more space so why not, after all?

A) 11...dxc4 12.bxc4 Nc6 13.Rb1 Rb8 14.Bd3



Position after: 14.Bd3

14...Bxf3 [On 14...Nb4 the reply 15.g4! is strong. Following 15...Bg6 16.Bxg6 or 15...Nxd3 16.gxh5 Nb4 17.Qe2 White has a marked plus, but 14...Na5 could be the necessary improvement that Black needs.] 15.Qxf3 Nxe5 [15...Nxd4 Is no better: 16.Qe4 Nf5 17.g4 and White wins a piece for only two pawns.] 16.Bxh7+ Kxh7 17.dxe5±



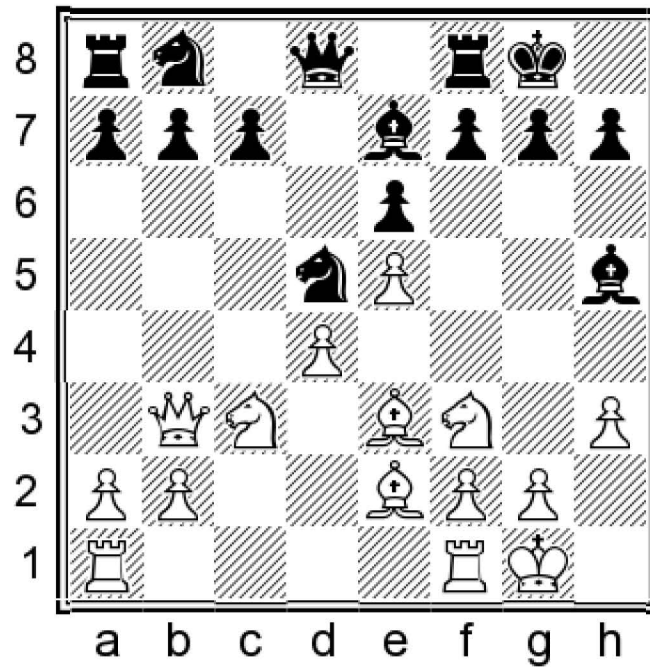
Position after: 17.dxe5±

This proved clearly better for White (!) in White, D (2408) – Everitt, G (2271) ICCF email 2008.

B) 11...Nc6 12.c5 Nd7 13.b4 a6 14.Qb3² Vogt, L (2480) – Neckar, L (2330) Leipzig 1976 [14.Rb1!?!].

11...exd5

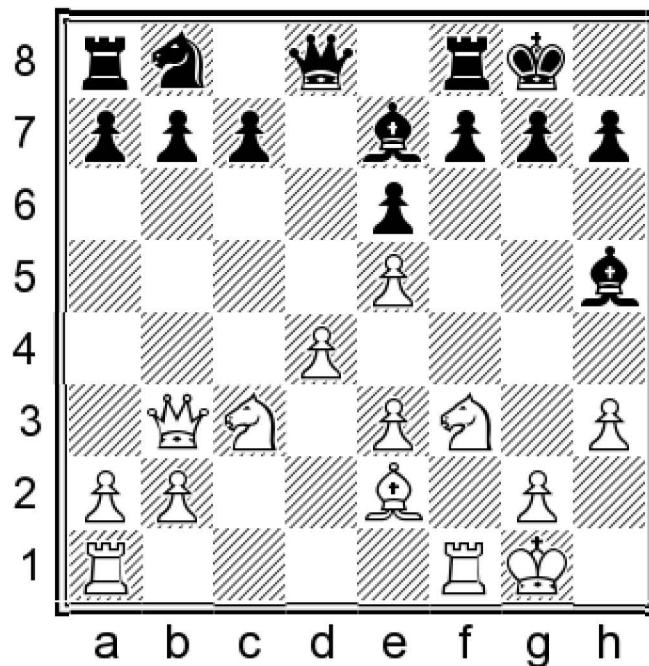
11...Nxd5 12.Qb3



Position after: 12.Qb3

Now 12...Nxc3? 13.bxc3 concedes White an edge without fighting, and a larger one than he gets in some other variations.

A) Trading 12...Nxe3 13.fxe3 offers Black potentially bright long-term prospects thanks to his bishops, but first he must survive the middlegame. The first obvious question, and quite a delicate one, is: how to deal with the attack on b7?



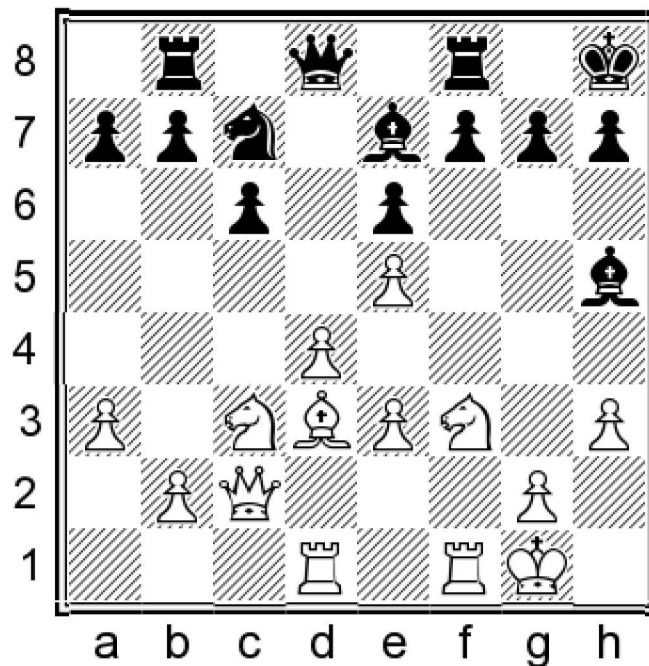
Position after: 13.fxe3

It seems Black's priority is to reduce the effect of the d4-d5 push, a goal which is best reached with knight moves.

A1) 13...b6? 14.d5 Bc5 15.dxe6± Giorgadze, T – Alburt, L (2505) Tbilisi 1977.

A2) 13...Qc8?! 14.d5 Bc5 [14...Nd7 also fails to provide Black enough compensation for his missing pawn after 15.dxe6 Nc5 16.exf7+ Bxf7±.] 15.Ne4 Bb6 16.Bc4 exd5 17.Bxd5 Nc6 18.e6± White's initiative is dangerous, Savon, V (2540) – Alburt, L (2505) Beltsy 1977.

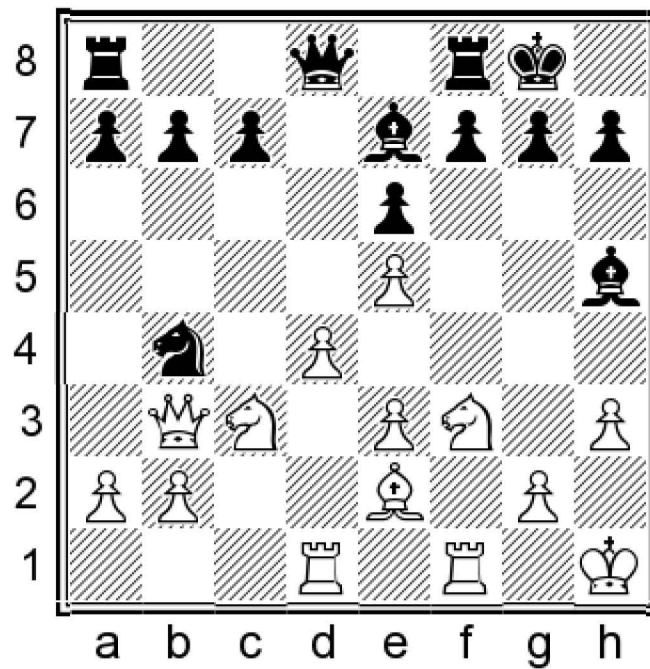
A3) 13...Na6 is an imaginative attempt, aiming at rerouting the knight to c7. 14.a3 [14.Bxa6!? bxa6 15.Qc4 may be slightly better for White, especially if Black can't free himself efficiently with ...c7-c5. The pawn-grab 14.Qxb7 is examined under 13...Nc6.] 14...Rb8 15.Rad1 c6 16.Bd3 Nc7 17.Qc2 Kh8



Position after: 17...Kh8

This happened in Morrow, W (2319) – Arnold, G (2251) ICCF email 2012, where White now embarked upon complications following 18.Bxh7 [another approach consisted in playing against the enemy pieces, by means of 18.g4!? Bg6 19.e4²] 18...Bxf3 19.Rxf3 g6 20.Rdf1 Qe8 21.Ne4 Kxh7 22.h4∞.

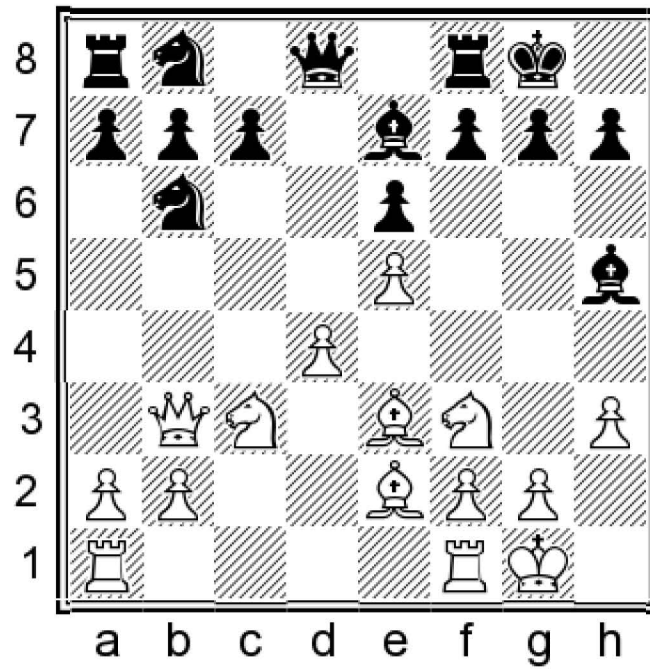
A4) 13...Nc6 14.Rad1 [14.Qxb7!? Nb4 15.Qe4 (If White is satisfied with a draw he may allow the repetition ...Rb8 Qxa7 ...Ra8 Qb7 and so on.) 15...c6∞ White has won a pawn but is somewhat embarrassed with his queen. A mix of ...Bg6, ...Nd5, ...Rb8 and ...c6-c5 will follow.] 14...Nb4 15.Kh1 We are following Pavlov, V (2385) – Anderskewitz, R (2325) ICCF email 2011. Placing the king in the corner seems directed against the sequence d4-d5 ...Nxd5 e4 ...Nxc3 Rxd8 ...Nxe2+ which would give Black adequate compensation for his queen.



Position after: 15.Kh1

At this point 15...Rb8?! 16.d5! exd5 17.a3± left Black with a difficult position, but 15...c6 16.e4 or 15...Nd5 16.Nxd5 Qxd5 17.Bc4 followed by d4-d5 were no fun either.

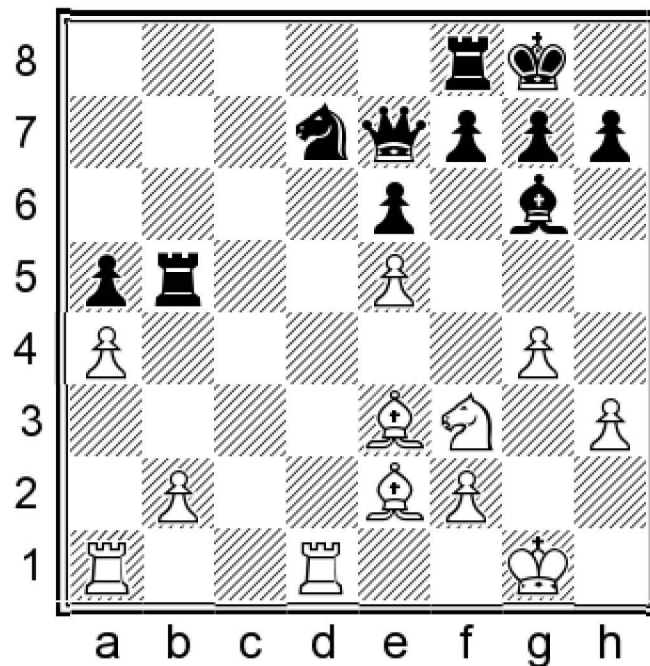
B) 12...Nb6



Position after: 12...Nb6

B1) Including 13.a4 a5 seems to eventually favor Black.

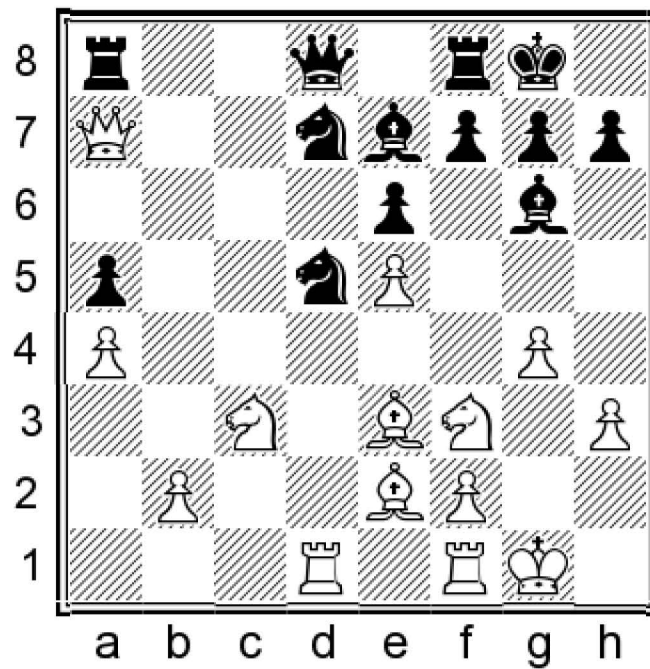
B1.1) 14.Rfd1 c6 15.d5!? Nxd5 16.Qxb7 Nd7 17.g4 Bg6 18.Qxc6 Rc8
19.Qb5 Rb8 20.Nxd5! [20.Qc6 Rc8=] 20...Rxb5 21.Nxe7+ Qxe7



Position after: 21...Qxe7

22.axb5! A refinement over 22.Bxb5 from the 1992 correspondence encounter Vinagre, H – Zarske, J, which is only about equal. By recapturing with the pawn White obtains a strong passer and activates his queen's rook at the same time (underlining the nuance between the two rook moves on move 14!). Black is far from dead and should seek counterplay with 22...h5![∞] and a timely ...Be4. On the “obvious” 23.Rxa5? the riposte 23...hxg4 24.hxg4 Qb4 would be a nuisance.

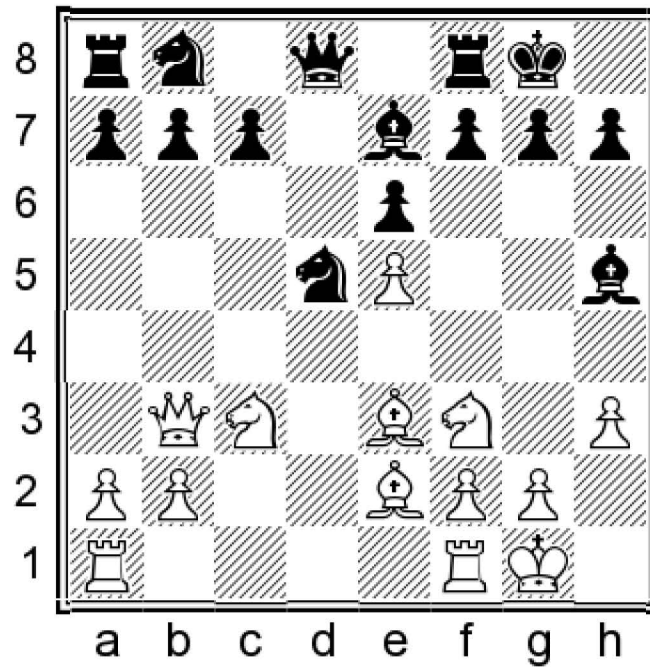
B1.2) 14.Rad1 could be less precise. 14...c6 [14...Nc6?! arrives one tempo short to get in ...Nb4 safely, and allows 15.d5!f.] 15.d5 This leads to a virtually forced repetition of moves. [15.g4 Bg6 16.Nd2 intending to push f4 keeps the game going.] 15...Nxd5 16.Qxb7 Nd7 17.g4 Bg6 18.Qxc6 Rc8 19.Qb7 Rb8 20.Qa7 [20.Qc6 Rc8=] 20...Ra8.



Position after: 20...Ra8

This arose in the 1989 correspondence game Bernardino, Z – Cirello, L, where White's unfortunate decision to deviate now with 21.Qd4? should have led to some trouble after 21...Bc5 22.Qd2 Nxe3 23.fxe3 and now instead of the game continuation Black should play 23...Nxe5!.

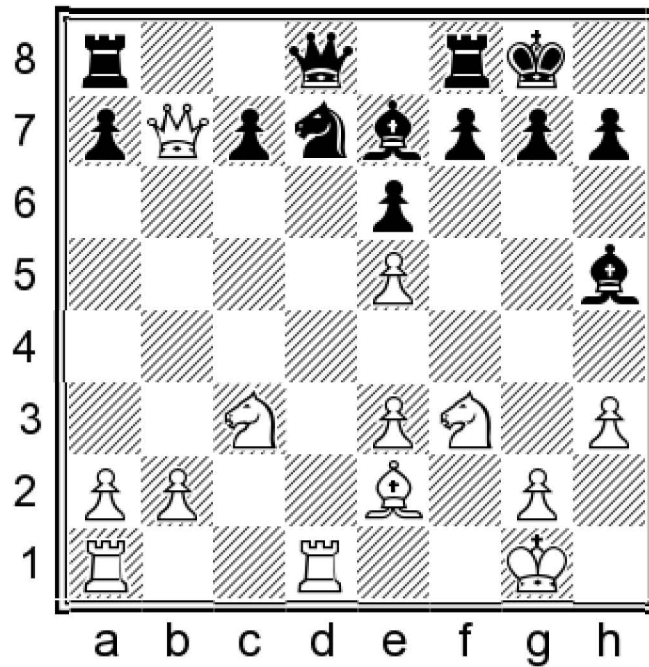
B2) 13.d5! Nxd5 [13...exd5? Is definitely worse on account of 14.Bxb6 axb6 15.Nxd5 Bc5 16.Rad1±.]



Position after: 13...Nxd5

B2.1) 14.Rfd1 c6 [The queen sacrifice 14...Nxc3 doesn't quite give enough: 15.Rxd8 Nxe2+ 16.Kf1 Rxd8 17.Qxb7±.] 15.g4 Bg6 16.Qxb7 Nd7 17.Rac1 N7b6 18.Qxc6 Nxc3 19.Qxc3 Nd5² Black bets on his mighty knight and the somewhat vulnerable white kingside to counterbalance his pawn deficit. Though the computer isn't impressed, I believe Black would have decent practical chances.

B2.2) 14.Qxb7 Nxe3 15.fxe3 Nd7 16.Rfd1

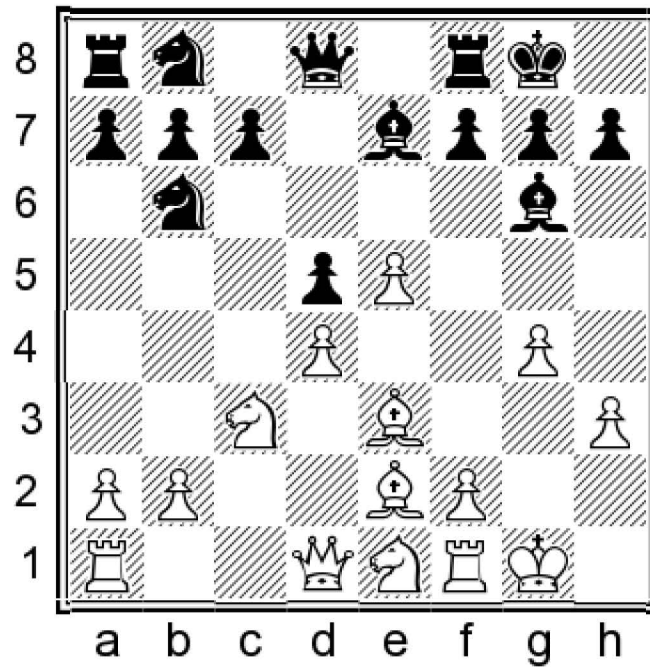


Position after: 16.Rfd1

We are following Felgaer, R – Valerga, D Buenos Aires 2015, where White's activity outweighs his doubled pawns and the rival bishop pair. 16...Nc5 [16...Qb8 17.Qxb8 Nxb8 this isn't too inspiring either, but possibly holdable] 17.Rxd8 Nxb7 18.Rd7 Bc5 19.Kf2 Bb6 At this stage rather than 20.b4, 20.Na4! would have given White a bigger plus.

12.Ne1

According to the motto "don't trade pieces if you have more space" it would be more logical to opt for 12.g4 Bg6 13.Ne1, but both moves are of essentially the same value [by the way, 13.h4!? hasn't been tried yet, if you feel like pioneering it!].



Position after: 13.Ne1

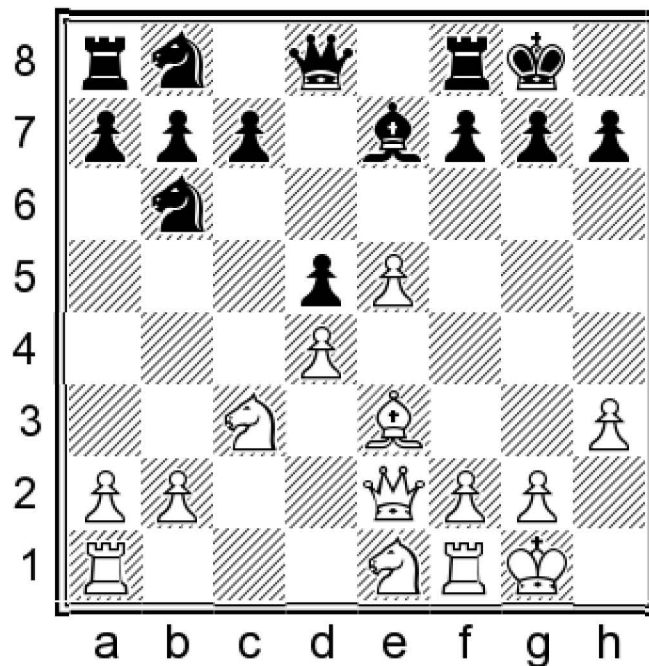
A) 13...f5?! is wrong in view of 14.Ng2!±.

B) The undermining 13...f6 makes sense. 14.f4 fxe5 [14...f5!? now that the f4-square is no longer available for a white piece] 15.dxe5 [or 15.fxe5∞] 15...c5 16.f5 Be8 17.Bf4 [17.f6!?] 17...Bc6∞ This nebulous position appeared in King, D – Baburin, A Birmingham 2000.

C) 13...Nc6 14.f4 f5 Svidler, P – Solozhenkin, E Elista 1995 looks more pleasant for White. The same goes for 14.Ng2 f6 15.f4, whereas the complications deriving from 15.Nf4?! fxe5 suited Black well in Emms, J – Baburin, A Isle of Man 1996.

12...Bxe2 13.Qxe2

13.Nxe2!? is also possible.



Position after: 13.Qxe2

White is ready to advance his f-pawn, and the most logical way to continue for Black is to block it on f4. We will examine the game Navara, D – Rapport, R Prague 2016 for a few more moves.

13...c6

13...f6 is playable too, as well as some other moves, but supporting d5 while initiating the knight transfer to the blockading square e6 is the most logical.

14.Nd3 Na6

If 14...a5 then 15.f4 f5 16.Nc5² is a bit annoying.

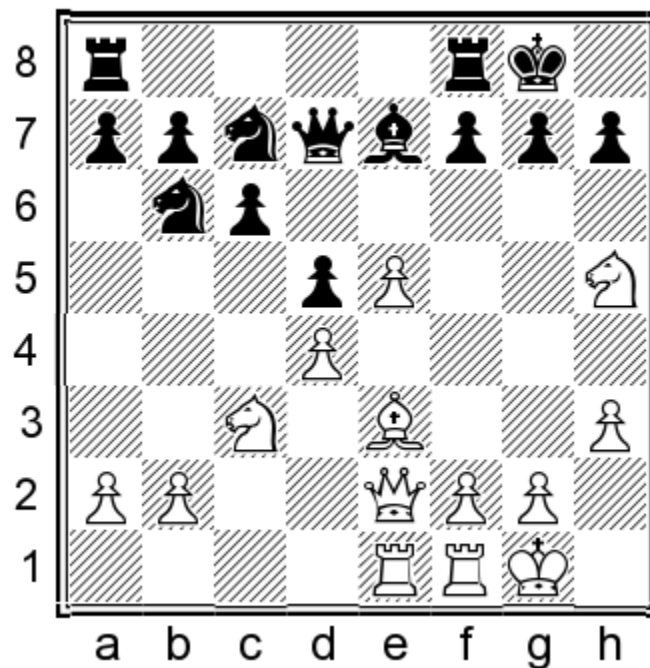
15.Rae1

15.f4 was natural but Navara preferred to keep that square free for his pieces. Following 15...f5 16.g4 it is unclear how to increase the pressure on

f5 and after 16...Nc7 chances are reciprocal.

The same goes for 16.exf6 Bxf6 17.Ne5 Nc7,,.

15...Nc7 16.Nf4 Qd7 17.Nh5



Position after: 17.Nh5

17...Rae8

White's offensive potential on the king's flank looks frightening, but the engine claims Black has enough defensive resources to resist.

Instead of his last move Black could also have gone for 17...f6, when 18.Bc1!? is unclear, 18.exf6 Bxf6 about equal and the flashy 18.e6?! Nxe6 19.Bh6 gxh6 20.Qxe6+ Qxe6 21.Rxe6 Kf7 a bit better for Black.

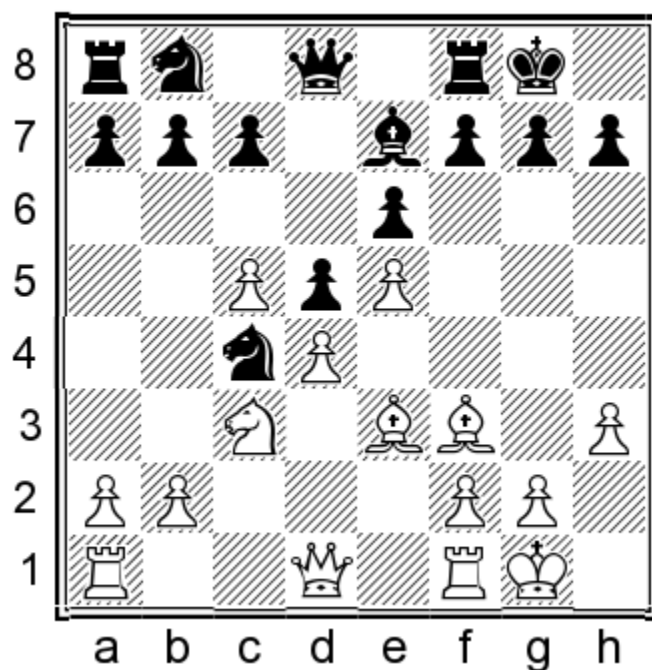
Conclusion: 11.b3 and 11.cxd5 are perhaps underestimated as they seem to ask Black some serious questions. The reason probably lies in the fact that the main line, 11.c5, is rightly considered to give White a risk-free plus.

h) 7.0-0 with 10.Be3 d5 11.c5 Bxf3 12.Bxf3

1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.Nf3 Bg4 5.Be2 e6 6.c4 Nb6 7.0-0 Be7 8.Nc3 0-0 9.h3 Bh5 10.Be3 d5 11.c5 Bxf3 12.Bxf3

Taking back with the bishop is interesting, but inferior to the traditional 12.gxf3.

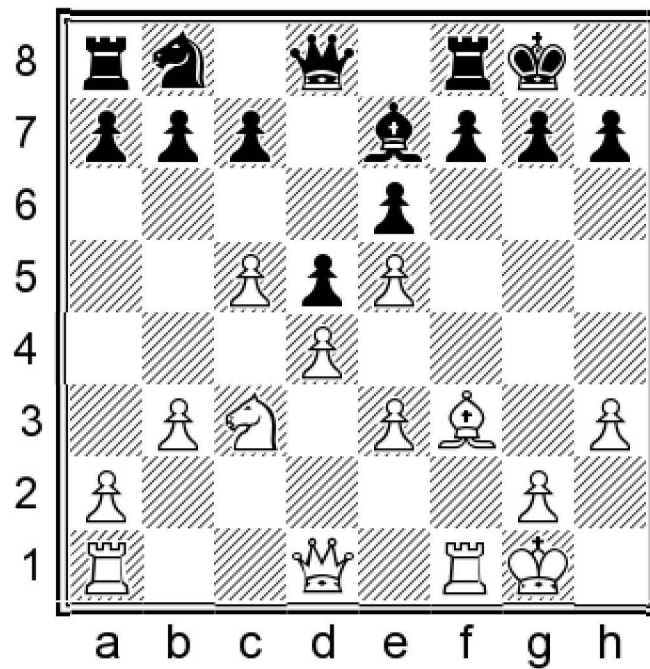
12...Nc4



Position after: 12...Nc4

13.Bf4

A) White can force matters with 13.b3 Nxe3 14.fxe3, which reinforces his center.

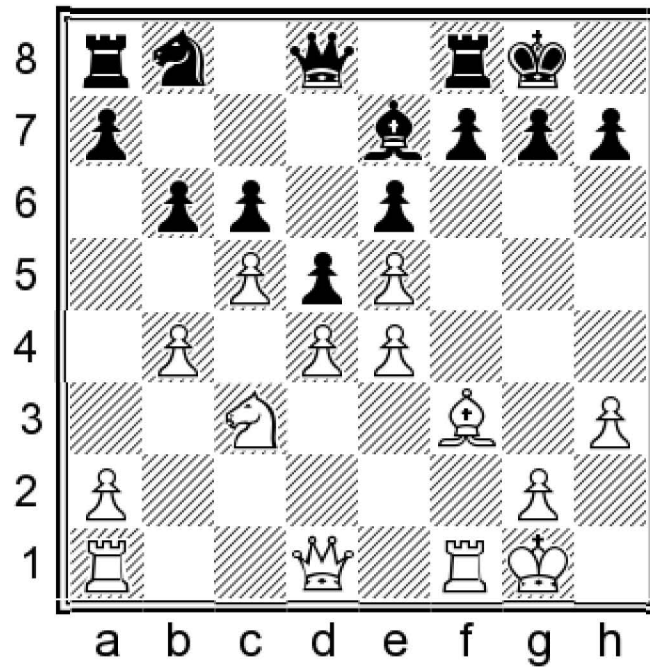


Position after: 14.fxe3

He will then likely push b3-b4 and/or e3-e4 to try developing some initiative. Careful play should, however, enable Black to level the chances.

A1) 14...f6?! 15.e4! dxe4 16.Bxe4 Nc6 17.Bxc6 bxc6 18.Qg4 f5 19.Qf4²

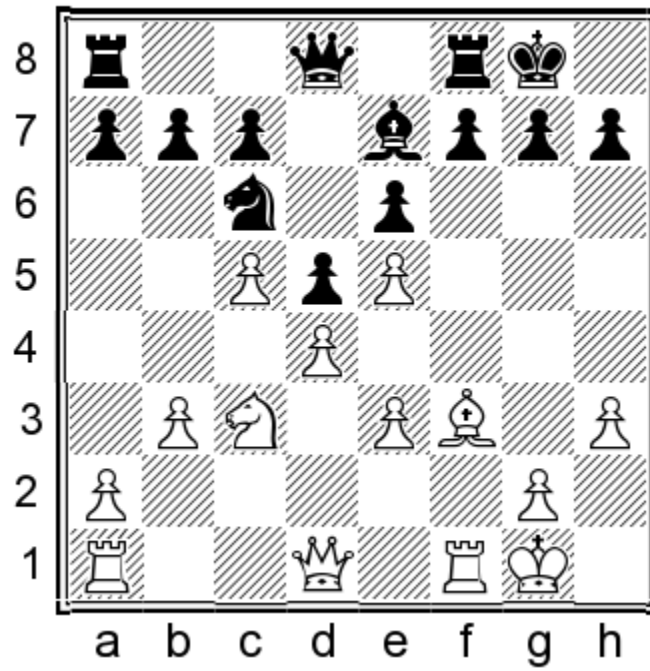
A2) 14...b6?! 15.e4! c6 16.b4



Position after: 16.b4

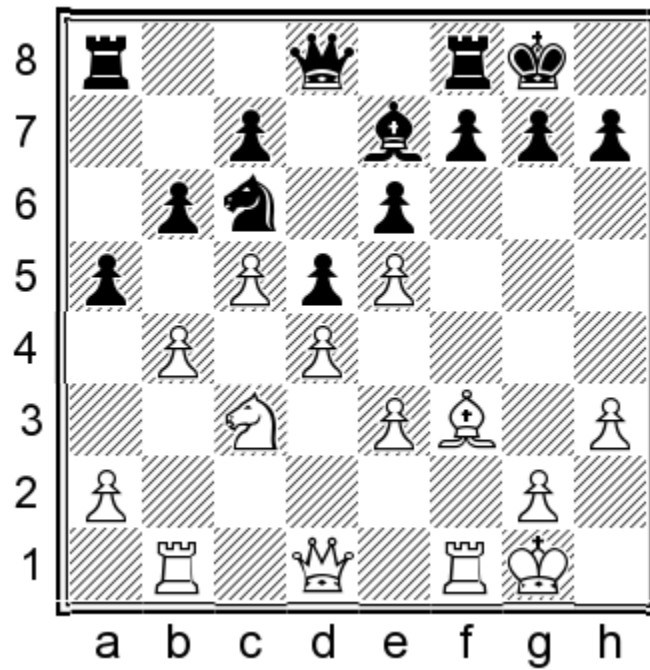
16...bxc5 [16...a5 17.a3 doesn't change much since after the general trade 17...axb4 18.axb4 Rxa1 19.Qxa1 dxe4 White would recapture 20.Nxe4, cover the d4-pawn, and plan the nasty Ne4-d6.] 17.bxc5² Spassky, B – Fischer, R Reykjavik 1972. Black will have to watch out for a piece sacrifice on d5, while if he takes ...dxe4 the pressure on the d5-pawn will be transferred to the pawn on c6. In addition, the white horse could soon land on d6.

A3) 14...Nc6! Stopping e3-e4 because the d4-pawn would hang after ...dxe4. Black's task to equalize is harder after the two logical undermining moves ...f7-f6 and ...b7-b6.



Position after: 14...Nc6!

A3.1) 15.Rb1 b6 [or 15...Bg5 16.Qd3 Nb4 17.Qe2 b6,,] 16.b4 a5

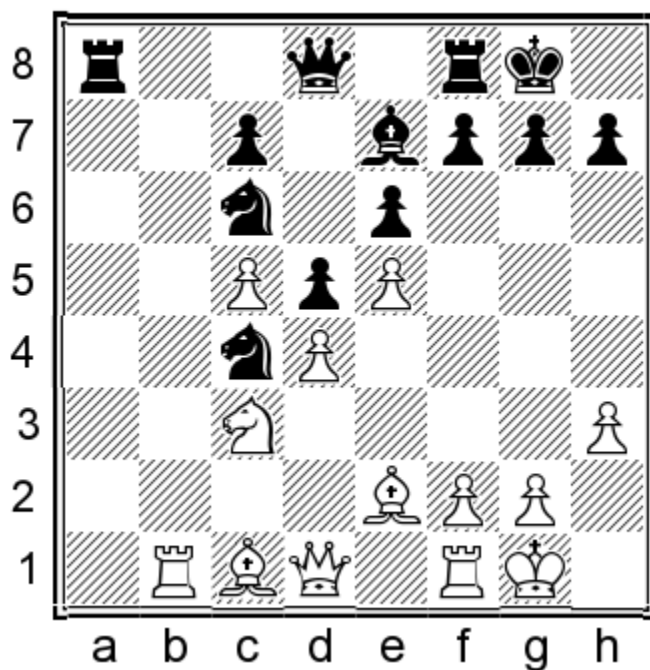


Position after: 16...a5

17.a3 Bg5 or 17.b5 Nxe5!? 18.dxe5 Bxc5∞. The e5-pawn will soon fall, making it three pawns for the piece.

A3.2) On the worthy alternative 15.b4 I'd advise beginning with 15...Bg5. 16.Qd2 [16.Qe2 makes no real difference] 16...Nxb4 A forcing move, at this point rated = by the cybermonster [as are 16...Ne7, 16...a6, and 16...b6]. 17.Rab1 Nc6 18.Rxb7 Na5 19.Rb4 Rb8= [19...Nc4? 20.Rxc4 dxc4 21.Bxa8 Qxa8 22.Qe2?]

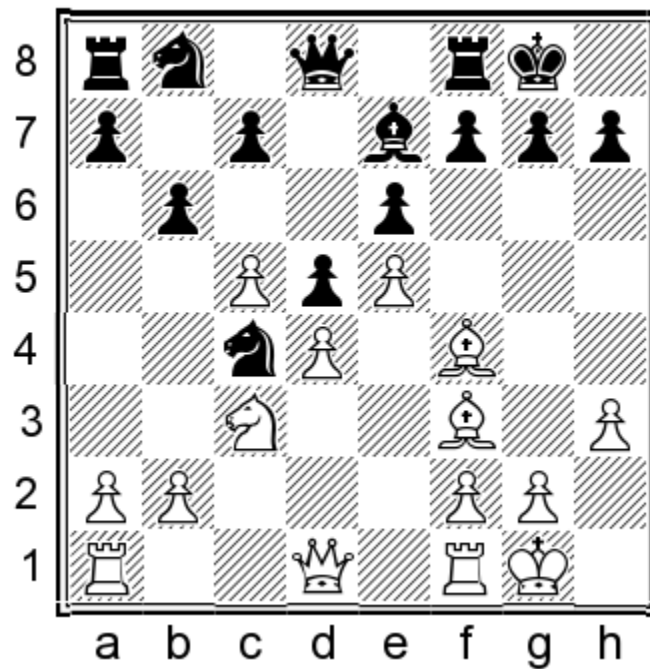
B) Since after 13.Bf4 the b2-pawn is unpalatable there is no reason to resort to the more passive 13.Bc1!?, which actually is not bad either. Here you see a fresh example of it: 13...b6 14.b3 Na5 15.b4 Nc4 16.a3 a5 17.Rb1 axb4 18.axb4 bxc5 19.bxc5 Nc6 20.Be2



Position after: 20.Be2

20...Qd7 [20...Rb8!?!; 20...f6!?!] 21.Bxc4 dxc4 22.Be3 and White was a trifle better in Beerdsen, T (2482) – Krayz, A (2375) Herzliya 2019.

13...b6



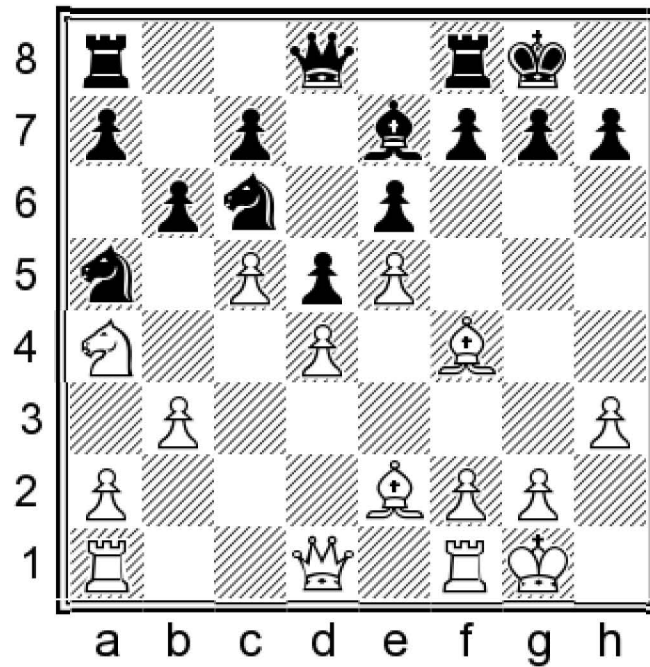
Position after: 13...b6

14.b3

Almost the only move White has played at this juncture.

The untried 14.Be2!?, however, deserves attention.

A) 14...Nc6 15.b3 N4a5 16.Na4



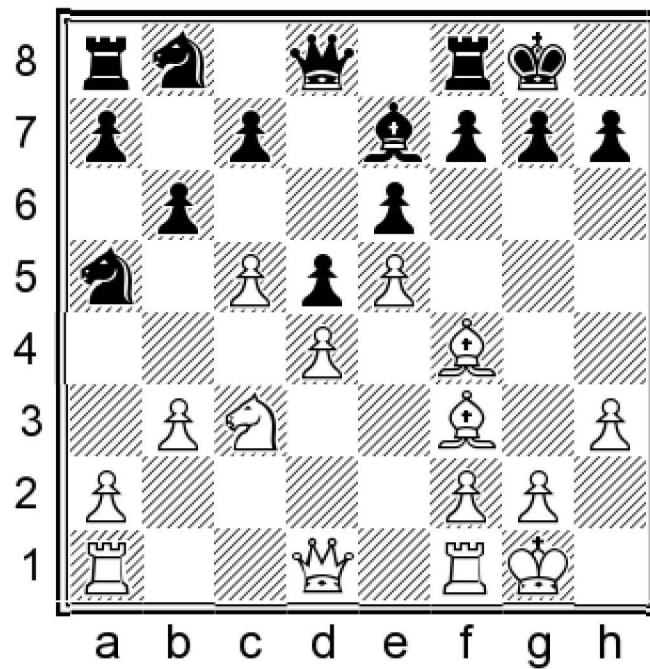
Position after: 16.Na4

If one compares this with ^(to the line)14.b3 Na5 15.Na4 bxc5 16.Nxc5 [after 16.cxb6 both recaptures give mutual chances] 16...Bxc5 17.dxc5 Black won't be able to achieve the setup with his knights on c6 and d7, if he continues 16...bxc5 17.Nxc5 Bxc5 18.dxc5.

B) 14...bxc5 Now there is room for investigation following 15.dxc5 or 15.Bxc4 cxd4 [15...dxc4?! 16.d5!²] 16.Nxd5 exd5 with a further split between 17.Bd3 c5 and 17.Bb3 c6 18.Qxd4 Qb6∞.

C) 14...Nxb2 15.Qb3 Nc4 16.Bxc4 dxc4 17.Qxc4²

14...Na5

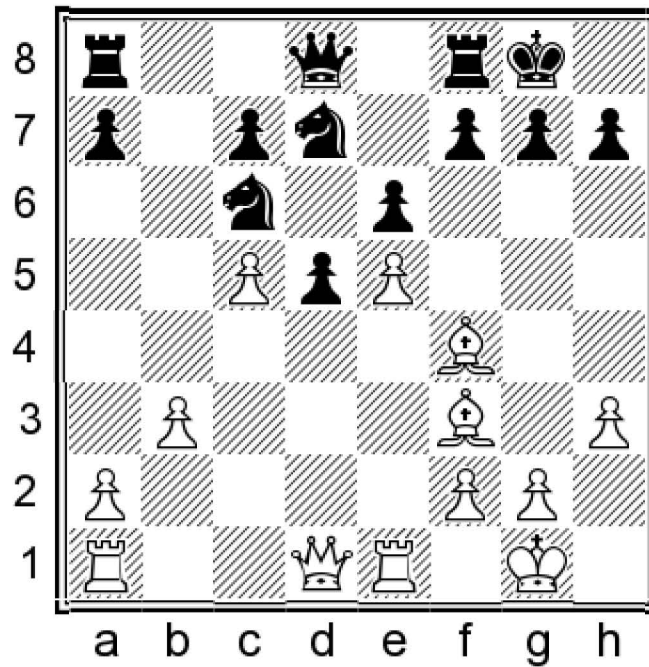


Position after: 14...Na5

15.Rc1

A) 15.Na4

A1) 15...bxc5! 16.Nxc5 [16.dxc5 Nac6= Cuijpers, F – Hjorth, G Dortmund 1980.] 16...Bxc5 17.dxc5 Nac6 18.Re1 Nd7=



Position after: 18...Nd7=

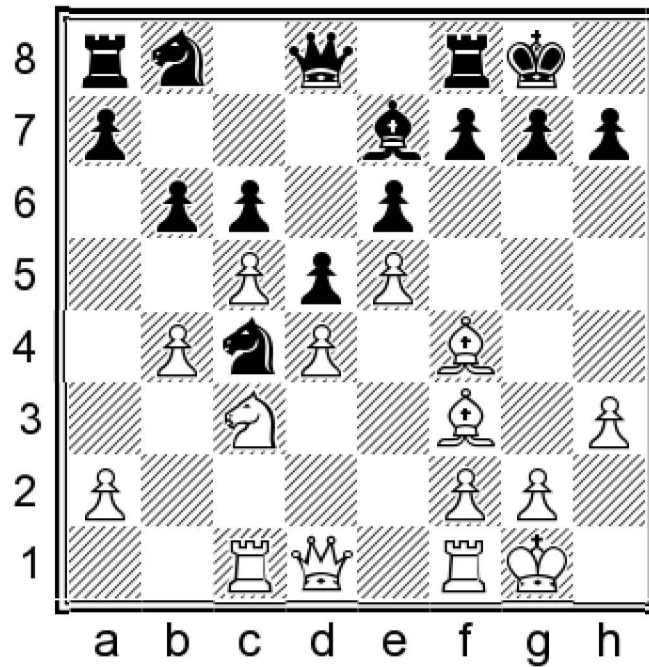
With equality in Gufeld, E – Gurgendidze, B Tbilisi 1980.

A2) 15...Nd7?! is less effective: 16.Qd2 [16.b4!?] 16...c6 17.Rac1²
Morgado, J – Gather, J email 1996.

B) Expanding with gain of time is also quite natural: 15.b4 Nc4.

B1) In the event of 16.Be2 Nc6 Black also seems to solve all his opening issues, as the following lines show: 17.Rb1 [if 17.b5 then 17...N6a5 18.c6 a6 19.a4 Bg5! and it isn't easy to prove than the knight duo is awkwardly placed] 17...bxc5 18.bxc5 Rb8[∞].

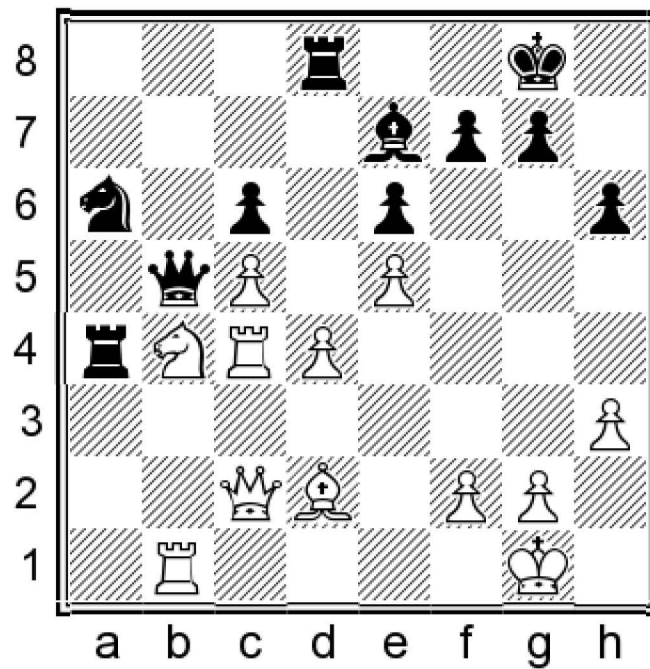
B2) 16.Rc1 c6



Position after: 16...c6

B2.1) 17.b5?! seems too hasty in view of 17...bxc5 18.dxc5 a6!³, but not 18...Bxc5? 19.bxc6 Nxc6 20.Nxd5!² as played in the 1979 correspondence game Van Oosterom, J – de Veij, A.

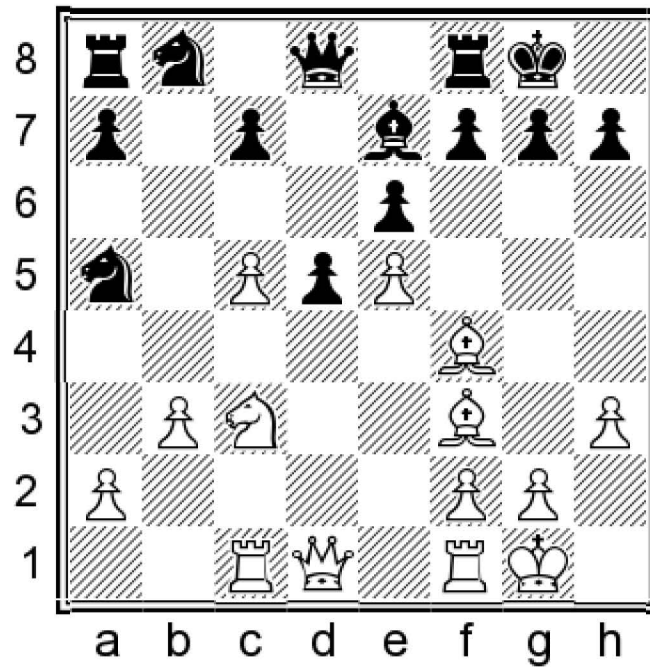
B2.2) 17.Be2 b5 [The ancient game Beliavsky, A – Albur, L Daugavpils 1974 saw 17...a5?! when “Big Al” returned the compliment with 18.Bxc4?! instead of spotting the superior 18.b5!..] 18.a4 a5 19.bxa5 Qxa5∞ C&K also reach this position in their analysis, with the same verdict. The correspondence duel Kratochvil, J (2201) – Greig, S (2099) ICCF email 2017 took another road: 18.Bxc4 dxc4 19.a4 a5 20.bxa5 b4 [20...Qxa5!?] 21.Na2 b3 22.Nb4 Qxa5 23.Rxc4 Qxa4 24.Qd3 Qb5 25.Rb1 Ra4 26.Qxb3 Na6 27.Bd2 Rd8 28.Qc2 h6.



Position after: 28...h6

It is very unclear if and how White can untangle and that game ended peacefully after the players shuffled their pieces around for another eight moves.

15...bxc5 16.dxc5



Position after: 16.dxc5

16...Nac6!

16...Nd7?! allows 17.b4 Nc6 and now the temporary sacrifice 18.Nxd5! brought White some edge in Adorjan, A – Pribyl, J Luhacovice 1973: 18...exd5 19.Bxd5 Ndx5 20.b5 Ng6 21.Bg3².

17.Re1 a5!?

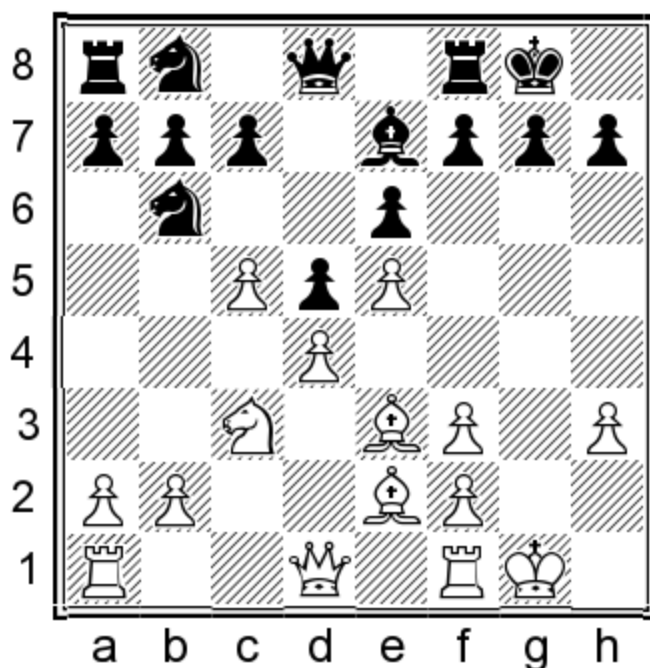
Intending to play ...Na6 next.

After the alternative 17...Bg5 White can speculate again with the knight sacrifice: 18.Nxd5!? exd5 19.Bxg5 Qxg5 20.Bxd5©. Overall if Black is reasonably well prepared the secondary option 12.Bxf3 shouldn't bother him too much.

(back to the text) If one compares this with 14.b3 Na5 15.Na4 bxc5 16.Nxc5
[after 16.cxb6 both recaptures give mutual chances] 16...Bxc5 17.dxc5

i) 7.0-0 with 10.Be3 d5 11.c5 Bxf3 12.gxf3 N6d7

1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.Nf3 Bg4 5.Be2 e6 6.c4 Nb6 7.0-0 Be7 8.Nc3
0-0 9.h3 Bh5 10.Be3 d5 11.c5 Bxf3 12.gxf3



Position after: 12.gxf3

12...N6d7

I found only 26 games with this reply, against about 370 for the main line 12...Nc8 (next subchapter). The reason is quite obvious: whereas retreating the knight to c8 may enable the “logical” follow-up ...Be7-h4 followed by ...Nc8-e7, the “only” idea of 12...N6d7 seems to be easing the ...f7-f5 push (rather than ...f7-f6, to which White would most of the time reply f3-f4). White can claim a slight plus in both cases, but if the main path (12...Nc8) has been followed for decades, the surprise value of its rare little sister is certainly of practical interest.

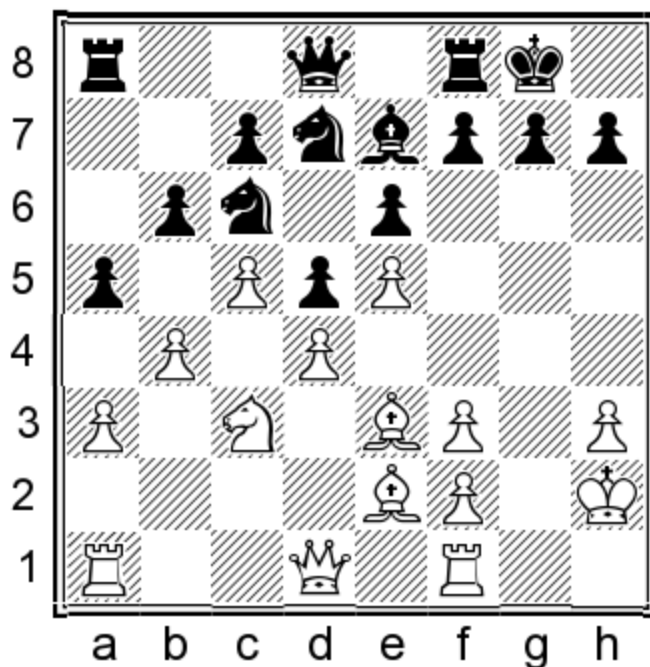
12...Nc4? 13.Bxc4 dxc4 14.Qa4± Drugda, M (2407) – Ressler, V (2301) Slovakia 2005. The c4-pawn is lost and Black is miles away from being able to generate any counterplay against the weakened position of the white king.

13.f4

White's most frequent reaction but transpositions are quite likely to occur since White's plan will generally consist of pushing f3-f4 and b3-b4.

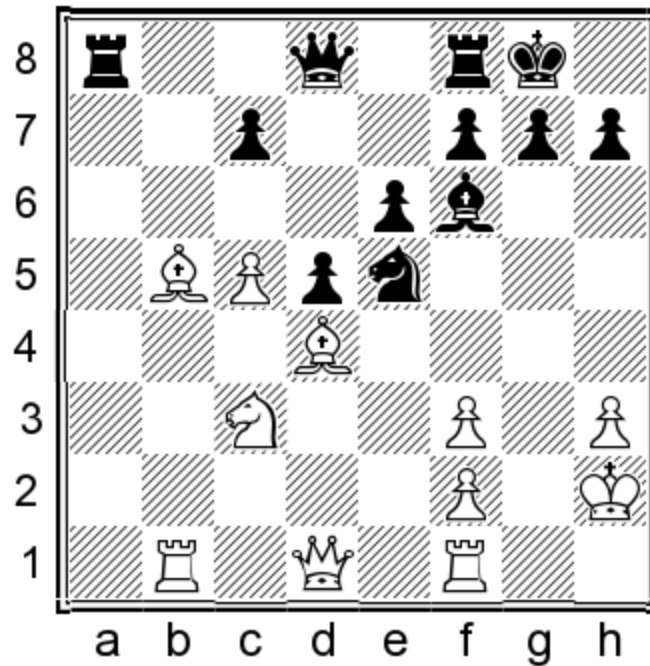
As usual in this line, the thrust f4-f5 becomes a concern for Black.

A) 13.Kh2 b6 worked well enough for Black in Rodriguez, K (2435) – Arnold, G (2390) ICCF email 2008. [On 13...Nc6 threatening a pseudo-sacrifice on either c5 or e5, followed by the fork ...d5-d4, White would answer 14.Bb5 f6?! 15.f4².] 14.b4 a5 15.a3 Nc6



Position after: 15...Nc6

A1) In case of 16.Rb1 Black can solve the issue of his cramped position tactically. 16...axb4 17.axb4 Ndx5 18.Bb5 bxc5 19.bxc5 Nxd4 [19...Bxc5?! seems worse, unless 20...Ra3 works: 20.dxc5 d4 – 20...Ra3!? deserves to be checked – 21.f4 Qf6 22.fxe5 Nxe5 23.Be2 dxe3 24.fxe3?] 20.Bxd4 Bf6©

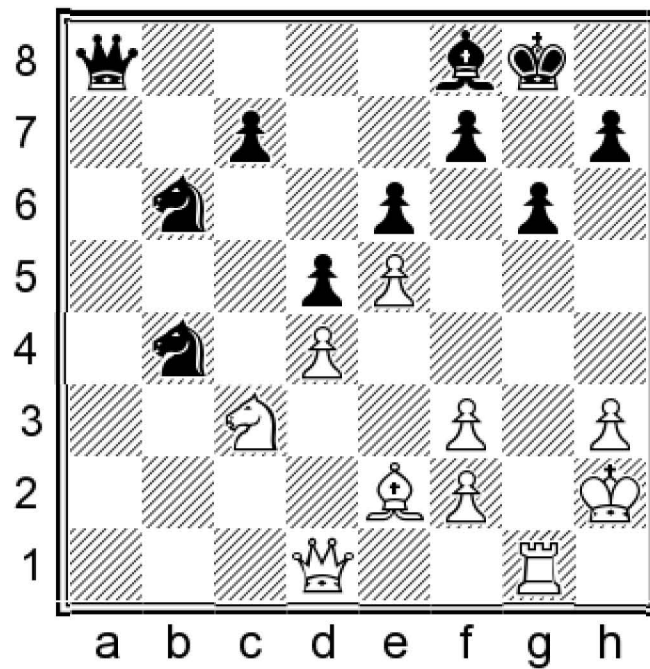


Position after: 20...Bf6©

Black has two pawns for the piece, a compact structure and the threat of ...Nxf3+.

A2) 16.Bb5 axb4 17.Bxc6 bxc3 also gives Black pretty decent compensation for his material deficit.

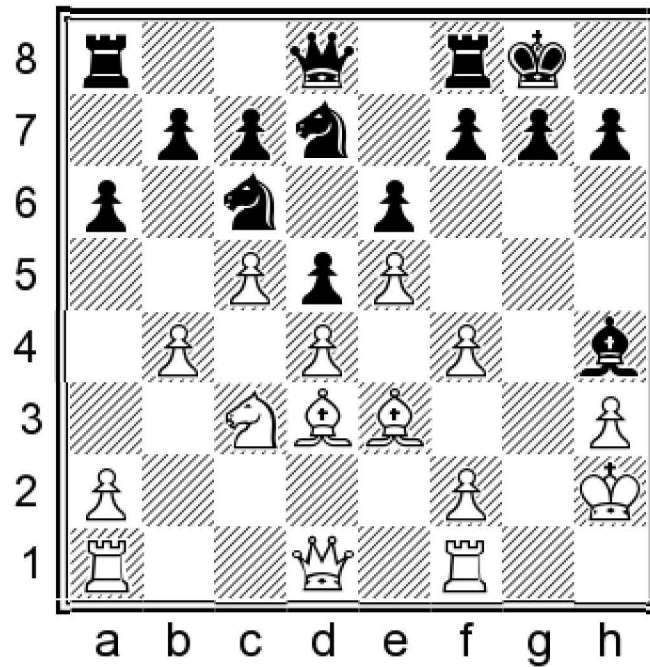
A3) 16.Rg1 axb4 17.axb4 Nxb4 18.Rxa8 Qxa8 19.Bh6 g6 20.Bxf8 Bxf8 21.cxb6 Nxb6©



Position after: 21...Nxb6©

The above-mentioned email game eventually ended in a draw, but I quite fancy Black's chances at this stage.

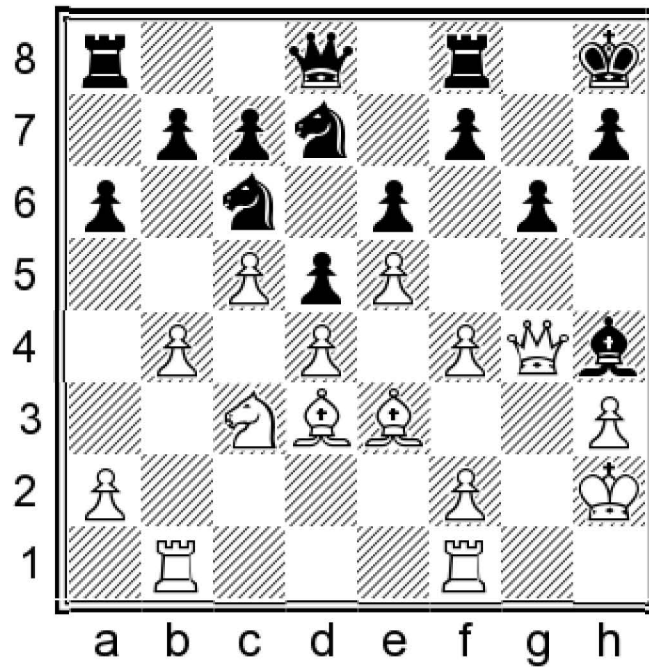
B) 13.b4 a6 [13...b6 14.f4 transposes into 13.f4 b6 14.b4.] 14.f4 Nc6
15.Kh2 [15.Rb1!?] 15...Bh4 16.Bd3



Position after: 16.Bd3

B1) The greedy 16...Nxb4?? would have been harshly punished by 17.Bxh7+ Kxh7 18.Qh5+ Kg8 19.Rg1+- threatening 20.Rxg7+ followed by 21.Rg1+, and if 19...Bf6 then 20.exf6 Qxf6 21.Rg3 followed by 22.Rag1.

B2) Black could, on the other hand, have gone for the less committal 16...g6, when a possible follow-up is 17.Rb1 [17.f5? Ndxex5] 17...Kh8 intending ...Nc6-e7-f5, which could happen after 18.Ne2 (aiming for Ng1-f3). Therefore White plays 18.Qg4.

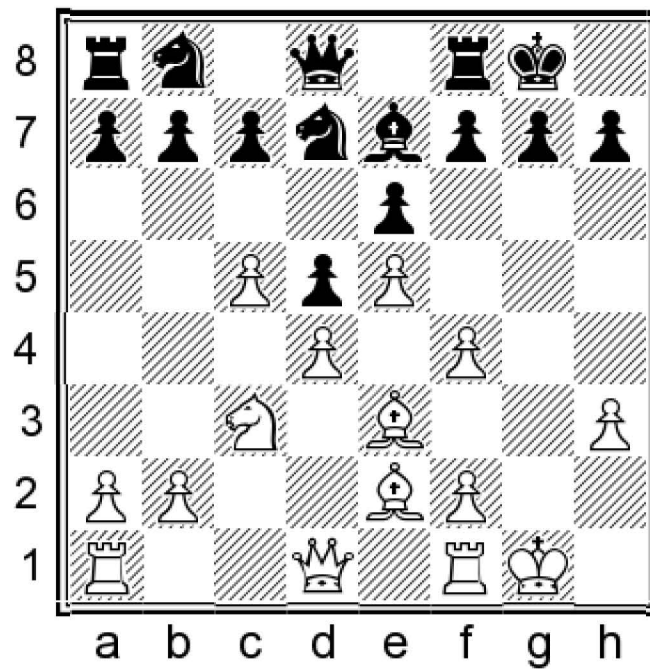


Position after: 18.Qg4

18...a5 [18...f5!? could end up being quite similar to 16...f5, but maybe Black has an improved version here. If White withdraws his queen, and Black doesn't want to just wait and see, maybe ...Rg8 and then either ...Nf8, ...h6 and ...Nh7 or ...Qe7 and ...Nd8-f7 followed by a timely ...g6-g5 can be tried.] 19.b5 Nb4 20.Be2 Nc2∞

B3) 16...f5 17.Qb3 [17.Rb1!?] 17...Kh8 18.Ne2 Qe8 This may well remain a bit better for White, but Black eventually held in Rauduve, A (2317) – Arnold, G (2360) ICCF email 2008.

Back to 13.f4.

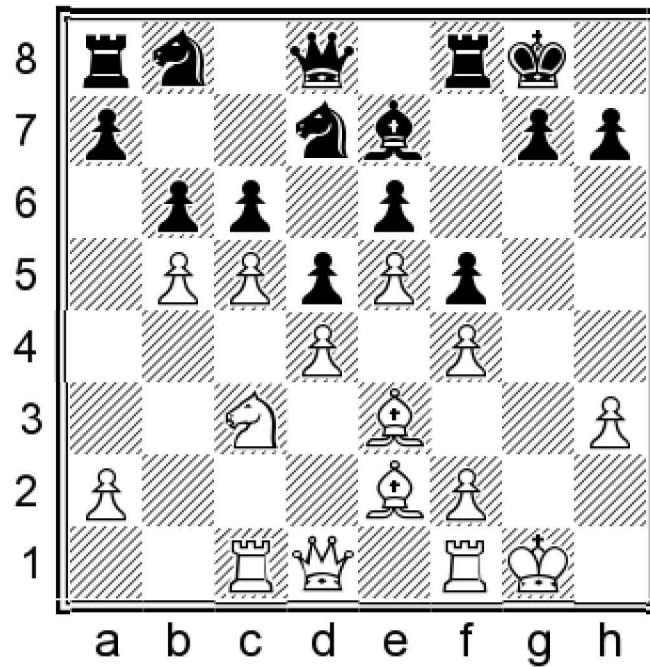


Position after: 13.f4

13...Nc6

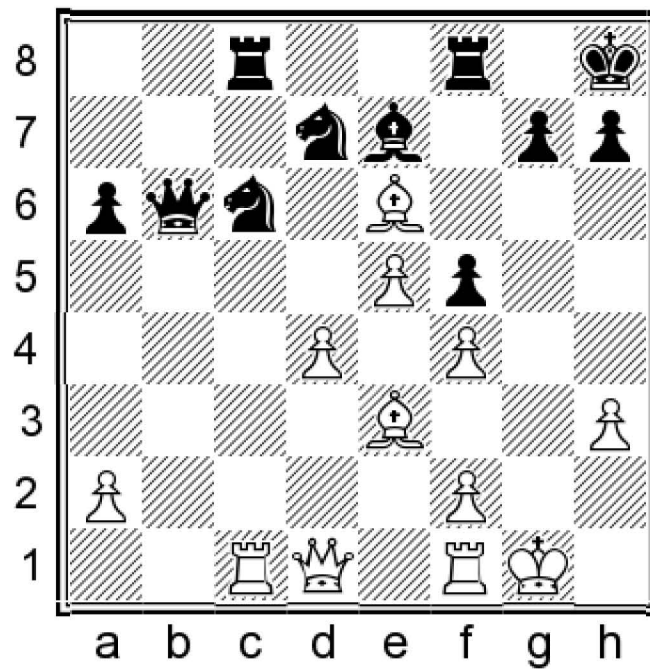
Probably the best option.

A) 13...f5?! looks worse, although it was chosen by a correspondence player rated over 2600. Surprisingly, it is the only move/example that Negi mentions. 14.b4 [14.exf6?! Nxf6∞] 14...b6 [14...a6!?] 15.Rc1 c6 16.b5!



Position after: 16.b5!

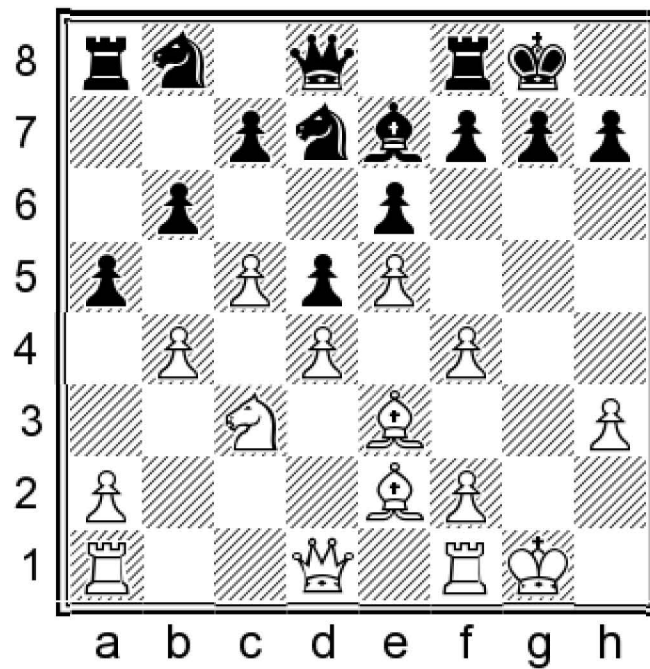
We are following the encounter Soderberg, P (2454) – Nizynski, M (2618) corr 1999 where White, better mobilized, opened up the game to his advantage. 16...a6 [The alternative 16...bxc5 wasn't any better: 17.dxc5 Bxc5 18.Bxc5 Nxc5 19.bxc6 Nxc6 20.Nb5± and Black loses one of his hanging knights.] 17.bxc6 Nxc6 18.cxb6 Qxb6 19.Bf3 Rac8 20.Nxd5 exd5 21.Bxd5+ Kh8 22.Be6±



Position after: 22.Be6±

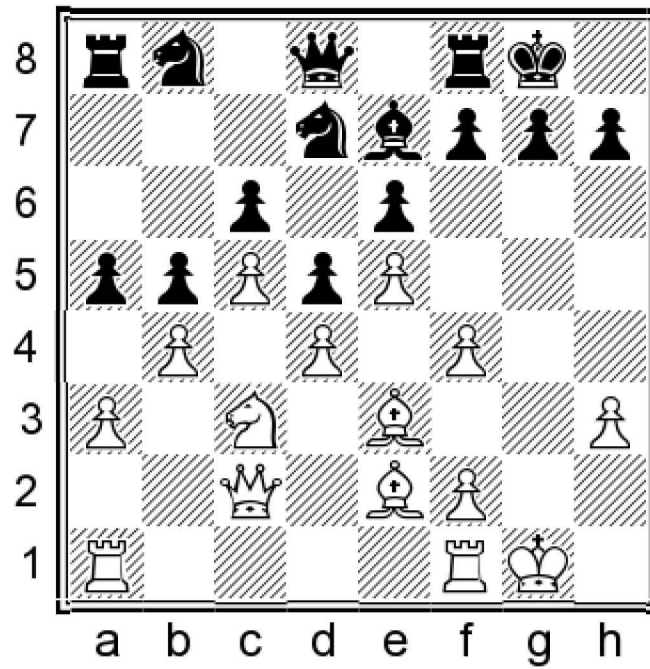
White was on top since 22...Ncxe5 now fails to 23.Rxc8 Rxc8 24.d5!.

B) 13...b6 14.b4 [The tempting 14.f5?! is less clear after the sequence 14...bxc5 15.fxe6 fxe6 16.Bg4 Kh8 17.Bxe6 c6∞.] 14...a5



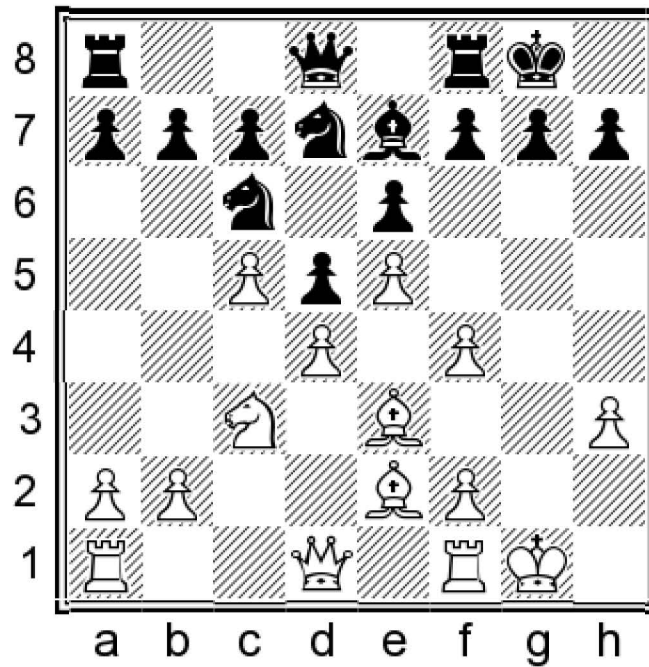
Position after: 14...a5

This way of undermining the queenside proved efficient against 12.Kh2, but 12.f4 is more useful to White, who can now secure an edge thanks to the somewhat artificial yet effective 15.Qa4!. Now Black plays 15...c6 to stop the problematic c5-c6. 16.a3 b5 [The exchange sacrifice 16...axb4?! doesn't give Black enough compensation after 17.Qxa8 bxc3 18.cxb6±, while Black doesn't seem to gain anything from closing the kingside if he goes 16...f6 17.Bg4 f5 18.Be2.] 17.Qc2



Position after: 17.Qc2

Now both f4-f5 and the piece sacrifice Nxb5 are in the air, so that Black is struggling. For instance, 17...axb4 18.axb4 Na6 19.Nxb5 or 17...Na6 18.bxa5 Qxa5 19.Bd2 Qd8 20.a4 bxa4 21.Qxa4±.



Position after: 13...Nc6

14.b4

14.Bb5 is worth consideration too, when Black should choose between 14...Bh4 and 14...a6 15.Bxc6 bxc6 16.Qa4 Nb8!? with the idea of ...Qc8-b7 and ...Nd7. Black can also try 16...Qe8 when after 17.Kh2 Nb8 he may soon continue ...f7-f6 and ...Qh5, while 17.Qxc6 Nxe5 also seems acceptable for him: 18.Qxc7 Nf3+ [or 18...Nc6!?] 19.Kg2 Nh4+ 20.Kh1 Nf5.

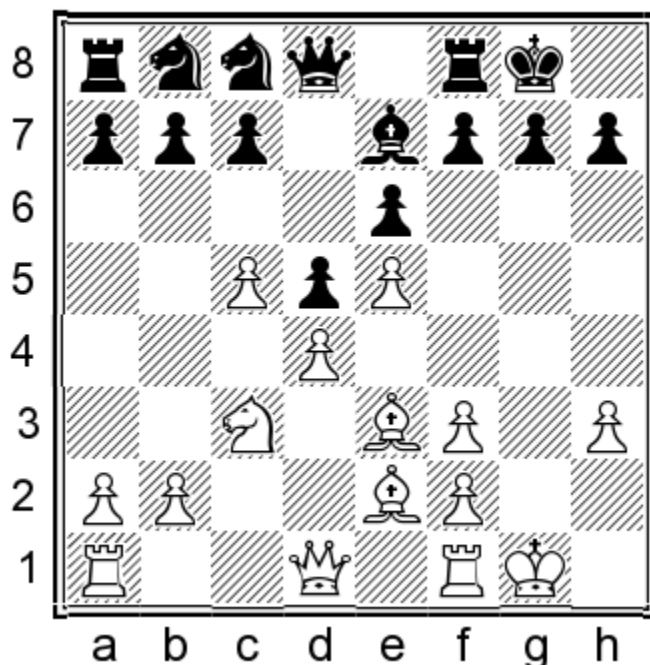
14...a6

Transposing into 13.b4 a6 14.f4 Nc6.

All in all 12...N6d7 doesn't equalize if White is rather accurate, but it may not be worse than the far more popular 12...Nc8.

j) 7.0-0 with 10.Be3 d5 11.c5 Bxf3 12.gxf3 Nc8 13.Kh2, 13.b4

1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.Nf3 Bg4 5.Be2 e6 6.c4 Nb6 7.0-0 Be7 8.Nc3 0-0 9.h3 Bh5 10.Be3 d5 11.c5 Bxf3 12.gxf3 Nc8

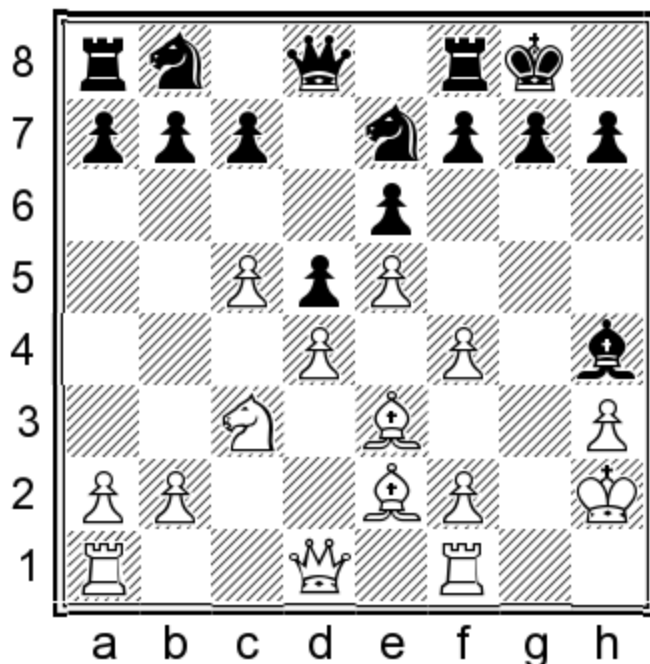


Position after: 12...Nc8

This position is quite important for the whole 4...Bg4/5...e6 line. It should be “holdable” for Black, given accurate play, but this is exactly the problem: a consensus exists that his winning prospects are quite low, which is my own opinion too. White’s doubled pawns are not a handicap since he can often get rid of them by pushing f4-f5, which softens the d5-point if Black takes ...exf5. Furthermore, White has acquired serious attacking prospects along the newly-opened g-file (another reason why the recapture 12.Bxf3 is considerably less frequent). Several moves have been tried in the diagram position, many transpositions being possible along the next few steps of the game.

13.b4!?

13.Kh2?! is rare, and though occupying the half-open g-file as quickly as possible makes sense, Black is given the one tempo he needs to level (or almost level) the chances. 13...Bh4! [13...f6?! doesn't help Black's cause since after his opponent's logical reply, advancing his own f-pawn, the trade ...fxe5 fxe5 will seldom suit the second player. 14.f4 Nc6 15.Rg1 White had a neat plus in Pinkas, K – Palatnik, S Voronezh 1987.] 14.f4 Ne7

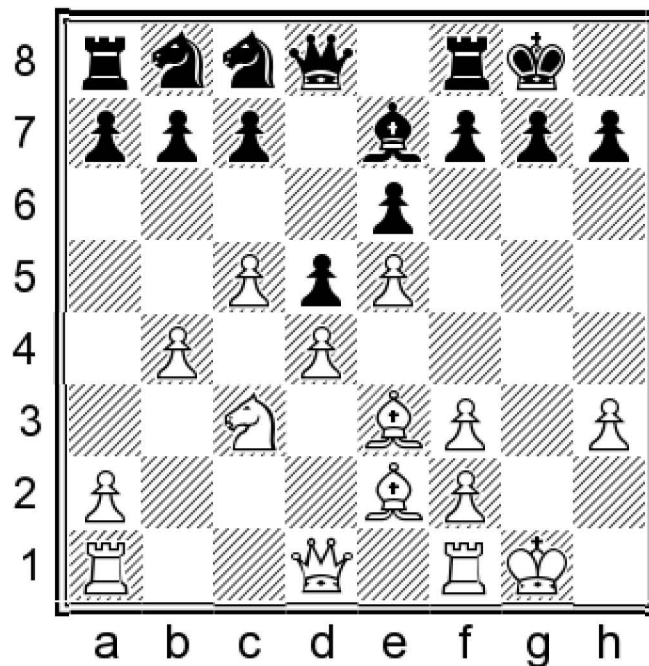


Position after: 14...Ne7

In this type of position White usually has found time to play Be2-d3 and bring his queen to the kingside. The game Wurschner, M (2285) – Ressler, V (2203) Slovakia 2003 continued 15.Rg1 Kh8 16.Bd3 g6.

A) On 17.Rg4!? Ng8! [safer than 17...Nf5] 18.Bxf5 exf5 19.Rxh4 Qxh4 20.Nxd5 Qd8 21.Nc3©.

B) 17.b4 Nf5 18.b5 c6 19.bxc6 bxc6! 20.Rb1 Nd7=



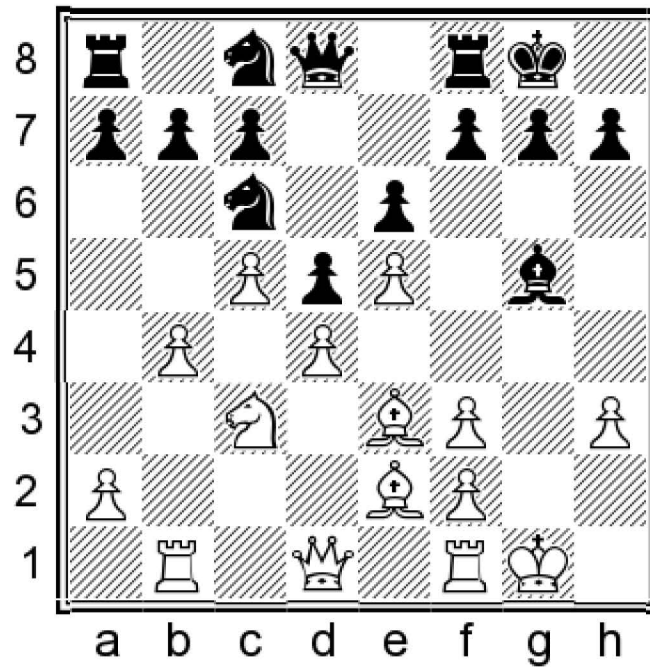
Position after: 13.b4!?

After 13.b4!? Black is at a crossroads.

13...a6

A) 13...f6?! 14.f4 fxe5 15.dxe5!± Stronger than 15.fxe5, as played in the 1979 correspondence game Adriaanse, T – De Veij, A. The light-squared bishop will go to either d3 or g4, making room for the knight to travel to e2 and then d4.

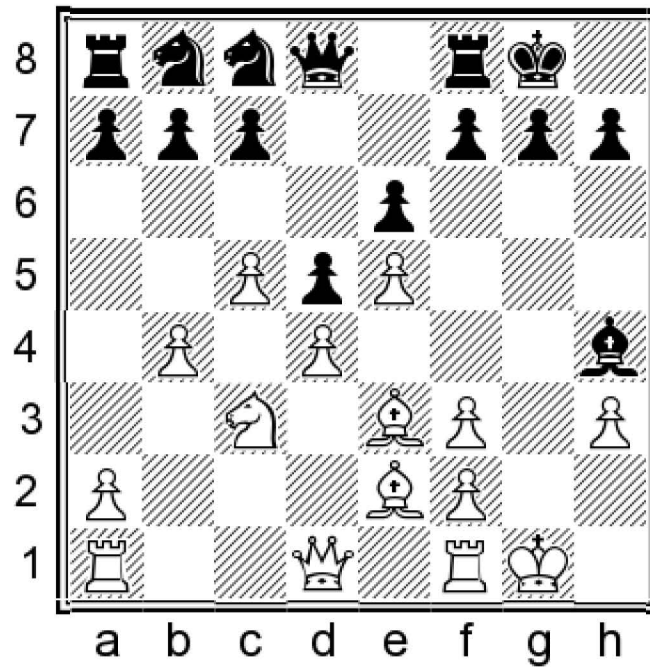
B) 13...Nc6!? 14.Rb1 [The alternative 14.b5 Na5 15.Qa4 or 15.f4 Bh4 16.Bd3 certainly deserved consideration. Perhaps White disliked the fact that ...Na5-c4 would be available in a remote future.] 14...Bg5!?



Position after: 14...Bg5!?

15.f4! [15.Kh2?! Stripunsky, A (2520) – Palatnik, S (2490) New York 1998. The king move gave Black the extra option of 15...Bxe3! 16.fxe3 a6, from which he refrained!] 15...Bh6² The black bishop seldom lands on h6. Black is ready for the usual ...N8e7-f5 maneuver and seems more or less OK.

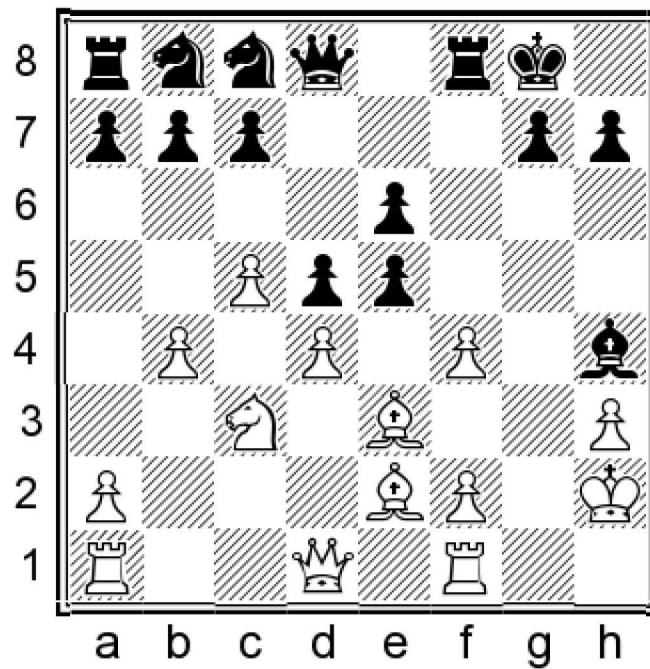
C) 13...Bh4



Position after: 13...Bh4

C1) 14.f4?! Imprecise in my opinion, because of what follows. 14...Ne7 15.Bd3 Nf5 16.Bxf5 exf5 This change of the pawn structure suits Black well; his next task is to send his knight to e6. 17.b5 c6 18.a4 Nd7 19.Rb1 Re8 20.Qd3 g6 21.Na2 Nf8= Galkin, A (2600) – Socko, B (2630) playchess.com 2006.

C2) In the event of 14.Kh2 the push 14...f6? is misguided. 15.f4! fxe5

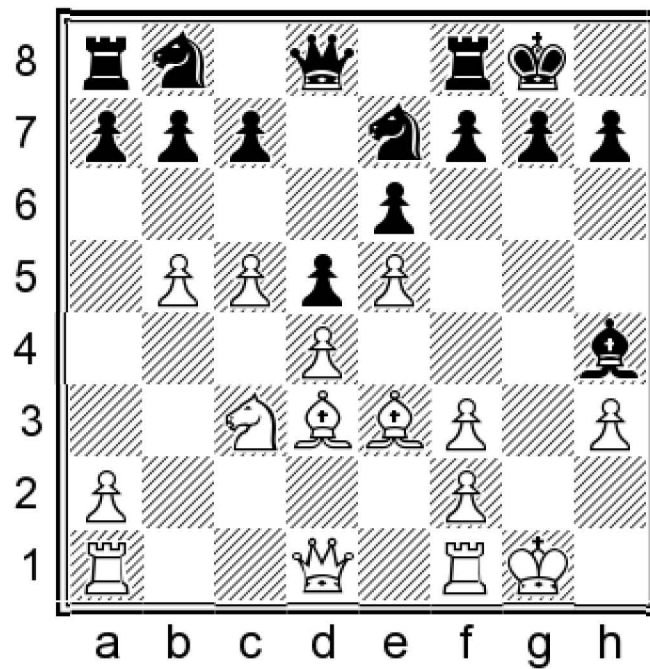


Position after: 15...fxe5

C2.1) Black got a balanced game after the recapture 16.fxe5? Ne7 in Stripunsky, A (2510) – Baburin, A (2520) Copenhagen 1994.

C2.2) 16.dxe5! would have put the concept under a cloud. 16...Ne7 17.Bd3 [17.Bg4 is good too] 17...Nbc6 18.Rg1 or 17...Nf5 18.Bxf5 Rxf5 19.Ne2 with a marked white edge in both cases.

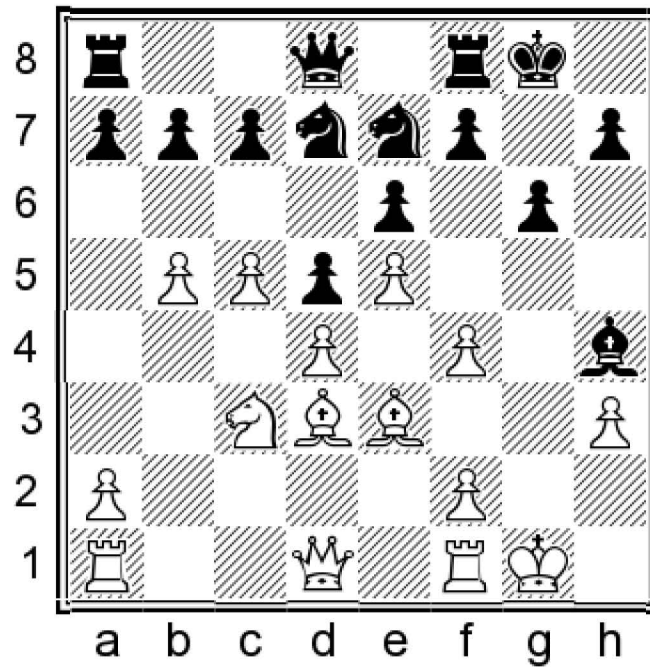
C3) 14.Bd3! Ne7 15.b5



Position after: 15.b5

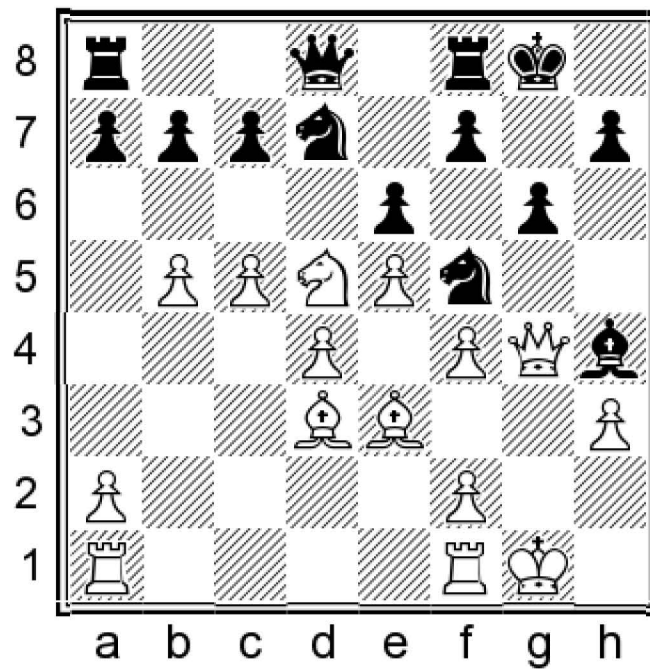
C3.1) 15...Nf5!? isn't unplayable, though White remains on top after the forcing sequence 16.Bxf5 exf5 17.Qb3 c6 18.bxc6 bxc6 [on 18...Nxc6 both 19.Rfd1 and 19.Qxb7 f4 20.Bxf4 lead to a white edge] 19.Qb7 Qd7 20.Rfb1 Qxb7 21.Rxb7 Na6². The knight is awkwardly placed and Black won't manage to swap all four rooks on the b-file.

C3.2) 15...Nd7 16.f4 g6



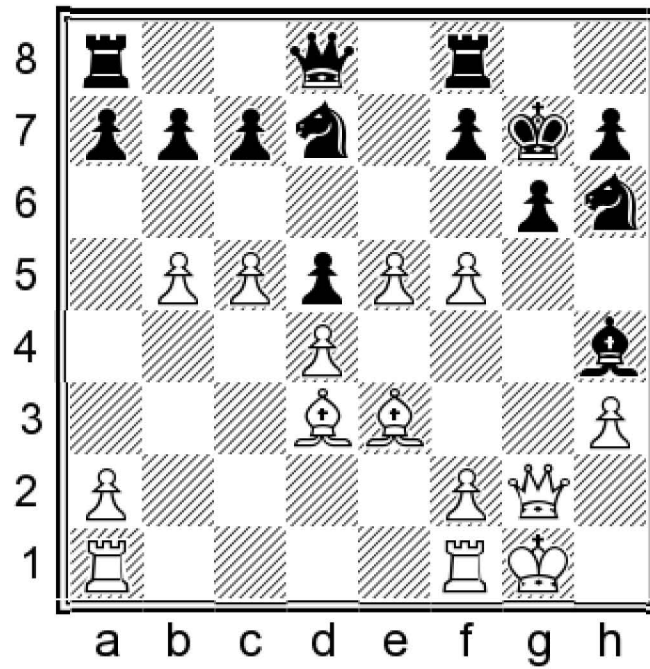
Position after: 16...g6

17.Qg4! The cybernetic improvement over its alternatives. [17.Qe2 Kh8² Kindermann, S (2540) – Jugelt, T (2350) Bremen 1998, or 17...c6!?!; 17.a4?! Nxc5 18.dxc5 d4 19.Be4 dxe3 20.fxe3 c6= Asgarizadeh, A (2421) – Berkes, F (2648) Rasht 2017, or 20...Nf5!?!]. 17...Nf5 18.Nxd5!



Position after: 18.Nxd5!

18...Nh6 [18...Nxc5 19.dxc5 h5 20.Qf3 The engine reckons this is much better for White, but this may not be so obvious for us human beings.]
 19.Qg2 exd5 [19...Nxc5 20.dxc5 Qxd5 White has several promising options here, such as 21.Rfd1 and 21.Be4 for example.] 20.f5 Kg7

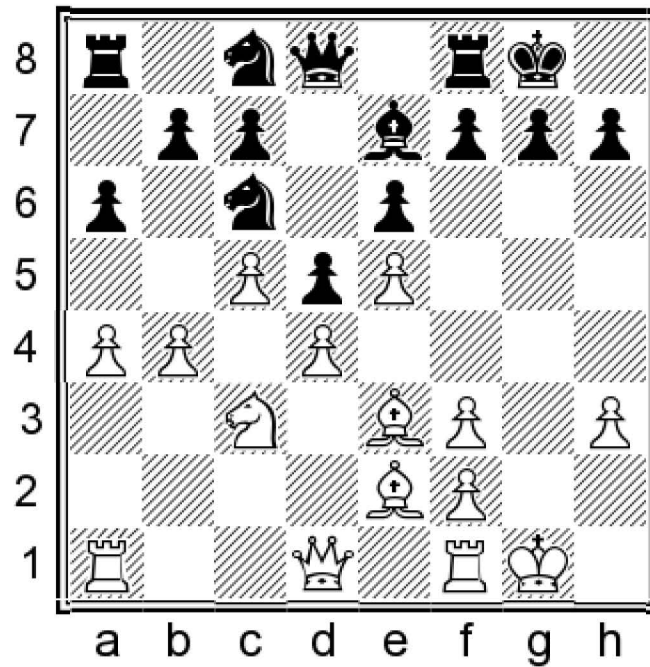


Position after: 20...Kg7

21.Kh1! [Instead of rushing with either 21.f6+ or 21.Qxd5 White takes his time.] 21...Re8 22.Rg1 Nf8 23.Qf3 Ng8 24.Rg4,

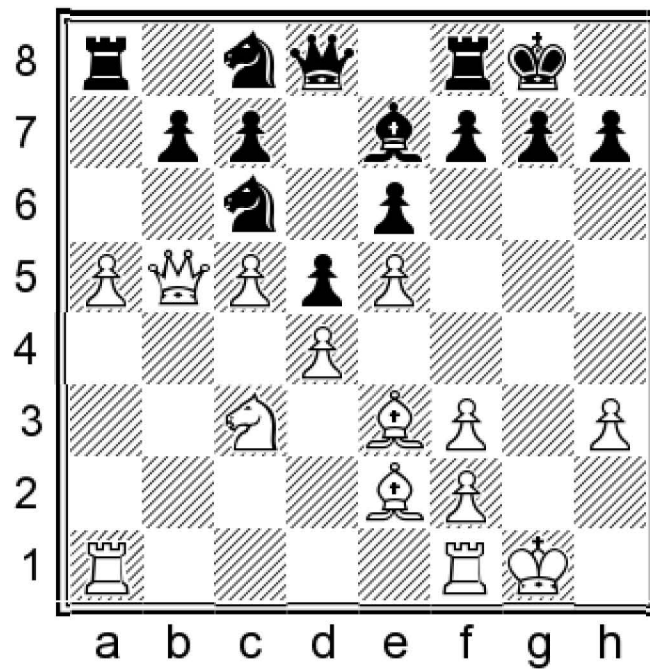
14.f4

14.a4 Nc6



Position after: 14...Nc6

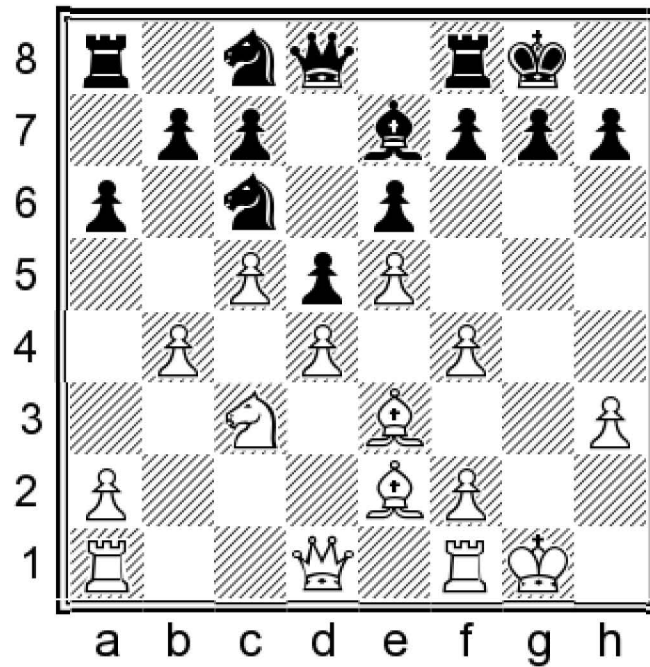
Blittkowsky, R (2173) – Graeber, I (2313) ICCF email 2014. 15.b5
 Otherwise Black is on time for his customary ...Be7-h4 and ...Nc6-e7.
 15...Nb4 [15...Na5!?] 16.a5 White cuts off the ...a6-a5 option. 16...axb5
 17.Qb3 Nc6 18.Qxb5



Position after: 18.Qxb5

Now Black should refrain from the tempting 18...Nxa5 19.Rxa5 c6, which leads to a white edge following 20.Rxa8 cxb5 21.Nxb5. Instead 18...Qe8∞ indirectly defends b7 and plans to pay the white king a visit after ...f7-f6 and ...Qg6+. 19.Qxb7? Rb8 20.Qxc7 Bd8—+

14...Nc6

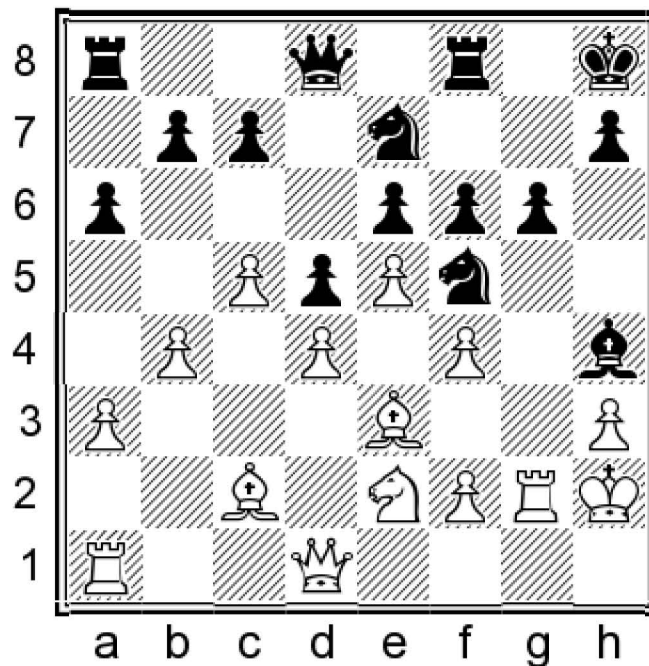


Position after: 14...Nc6

15.f5!?

White disturbs Black's desired plan of ...Bh4 followed by ...N8e7 and ...Nf5.

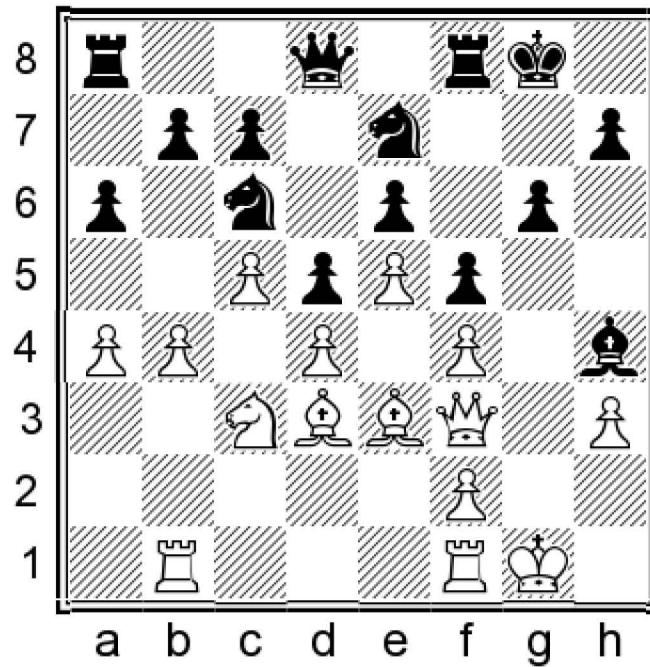
A) 15.Kh2 Bh4 16.Bd3 g6 17.a3 N8e7 18.Rg1 Kh8 19.Bc2 Nf5 20.Rg2 Nce7 21.Ne2 f6∞ The combatants agreed a draw now in Spassky, B – Bagirov, V Moscow 1979.



Position after: 21...f6

In comparison with what Black usually gets the current position is a dream!

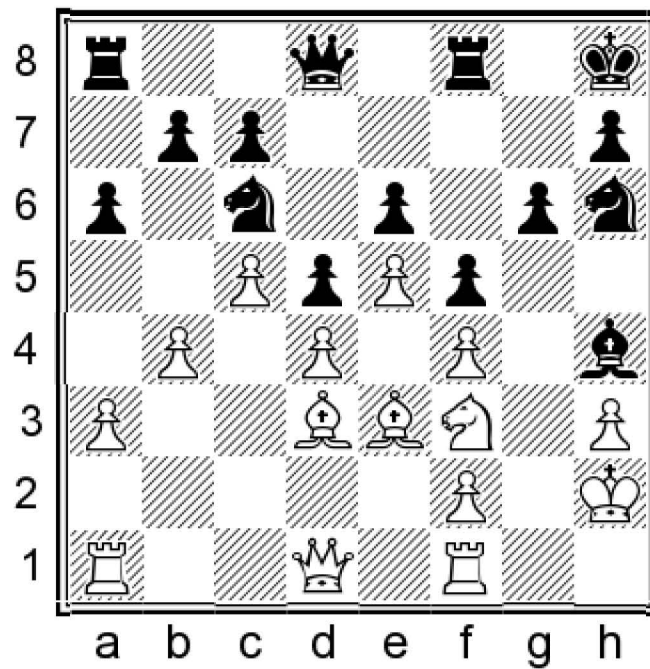
B) 15.Rb1 There isn't much difference between this move and 15.a3, especially since if White then tries (after 15.Rb1) to save time with a2-a4, the reply ...a6-a5 could prove annoying. The white knight can switch to the f3-square by two journeys: b1-d2-f3 and e2-g1-f3. Most of the time this will be equivalent because Be2-d3 and Kg1-h2 are both useful to White. 15...Bh4 16.Bd3 g6 [16...f5 at once is analogous] 17.Qg4 f5 18.Qf3 N8e7 19.a4



Position after: 19.a4

Stec, J (2373) – Pupak, T (2050) Slovakia corr 2004. Now rather than 19...Qd7?!, which allowed 20.b5! axb5 21.axb5±, neutralizing that idea with 19...a5! looks smarter and playable for Black.

C) 15.a3 Bh4 16.Bd3 g6 17.Qg4 f5 18.Qd1 Kh8 19.Kh2 N8e7 20.Ne2 Ng8 21.Ng1 Nh6 22.Nf3² Solozhenkin, E – Bagirov, V Sevastopol 1986.

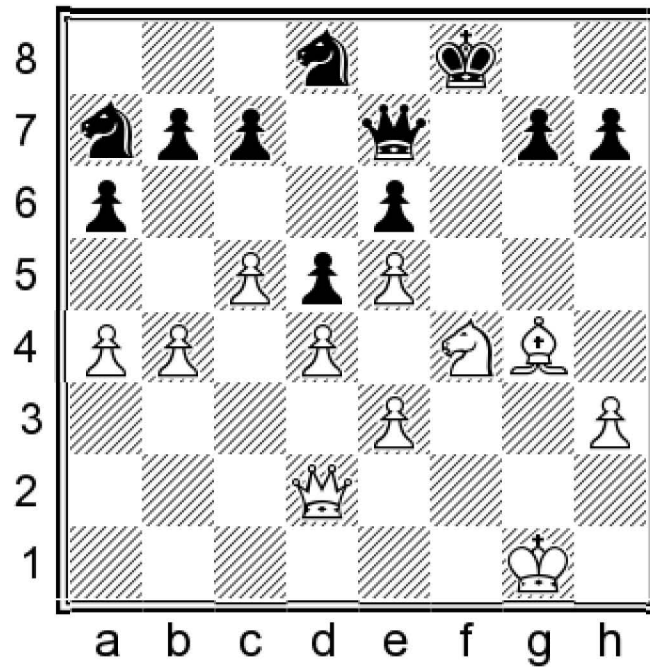


Position after: 22.Nf3²

White stands better but he will have to maneuver for a while if he wants to break through the black armor.

15...Bh4

A) Black suffered before he finally collapsed in another correspondence game, namely Karasova, E – Bobel, P 2008, following 15...Bg5?! 16.fxe6 fxe6 17.Bg4 Qe7 18.Qd2 Bxe3 19.fxe3 N8a7 20.Ne2! Rxf1+ 21.Rxf1 Rf8 22.Rxf8+ Kxf8 23.Nf4 Nd8 24.a4±.



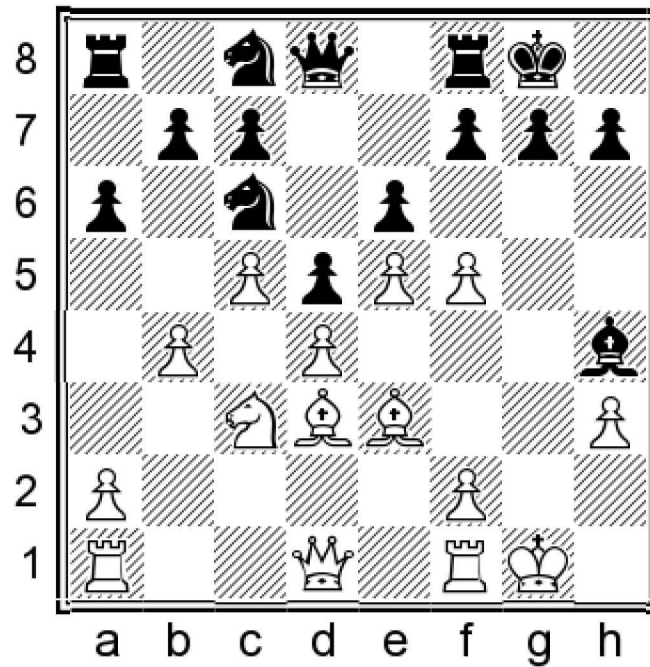
Position after: 24.a4±

The persistent pressure on e6 is annoying and White could try to break with b4-b5 or e3-e4.

B) 15...exf5!? 16.Bf3 and now both 16...Bg5 and 16...f4 17.Bxf4 Bg5 look just slightly better for White.

C) 15...f6!? 16.exf6 Bxf6 17.fxe6 N8e7 $\infty/2$. Black takes a little gamble that he will sooner or later recover his invested pawn and that his sounder pawn structure will counterbalance the rival bishops.

16.Bd3



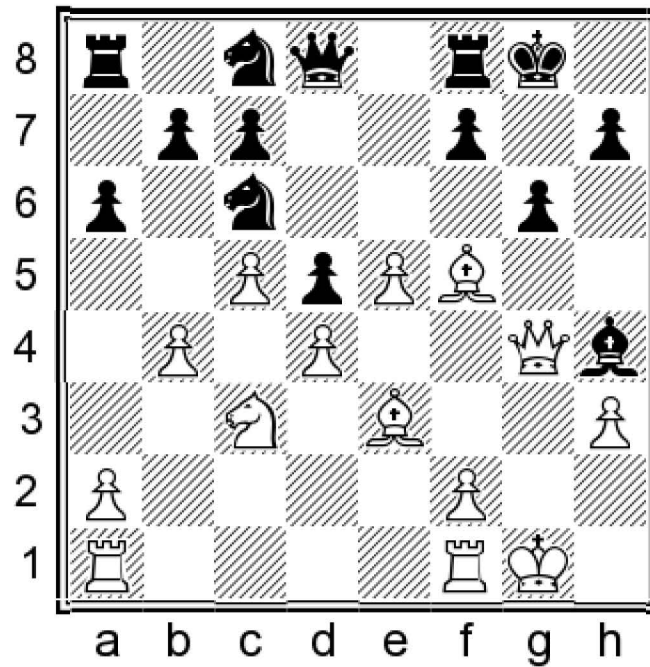
Position after: 16.Bd3

16...exf5?!

16...Nxb4! 17.Bb1 exf5 18.Bxf5© Compared to the game, Black has at least snatched a pawn and could now try to save his skin with 18...Ne7.

17.Bxf5 g6 18.Qg4

This happened in the correspondence duel Drugda, M (2400) – Pupak, T (2050) Slovakia 2004



Position after: 18.Qg4

18...h5?

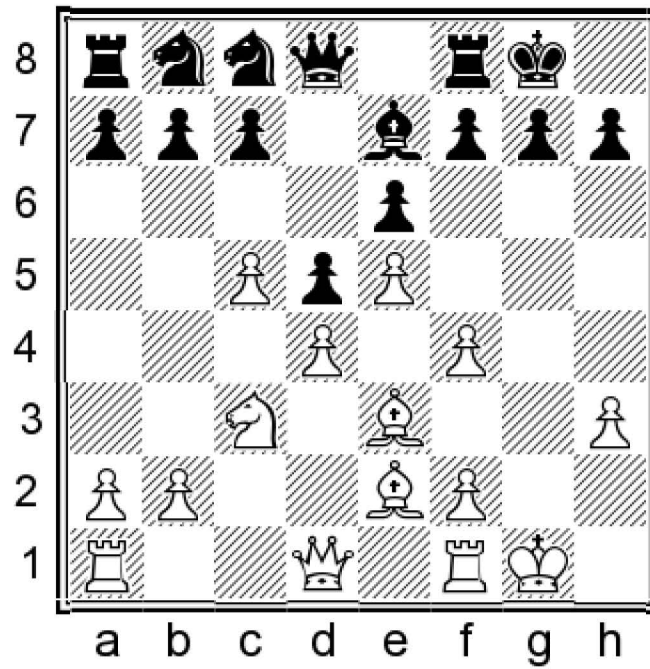
After this mistake Black soon had to resign.

18...Kh8 was a more tenacious defence, though I'm not sure it would have saved him.

19.Qf4 N8e7 20.Bb1 1-0

k) 7.0-0 with 10.Be3 d5 11.c5 Bxf3 12.gxf3 Nc8 13.f4 --

1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.Nf3 Bg4 5.Be2 e6 6.c4 Nb6 7.0-0 Be7 8.Nc3 0-0 9.h3 Bh5 10.Be3 d5 11.c5 Bxf3 12.gxf3 Nc8 13.f4

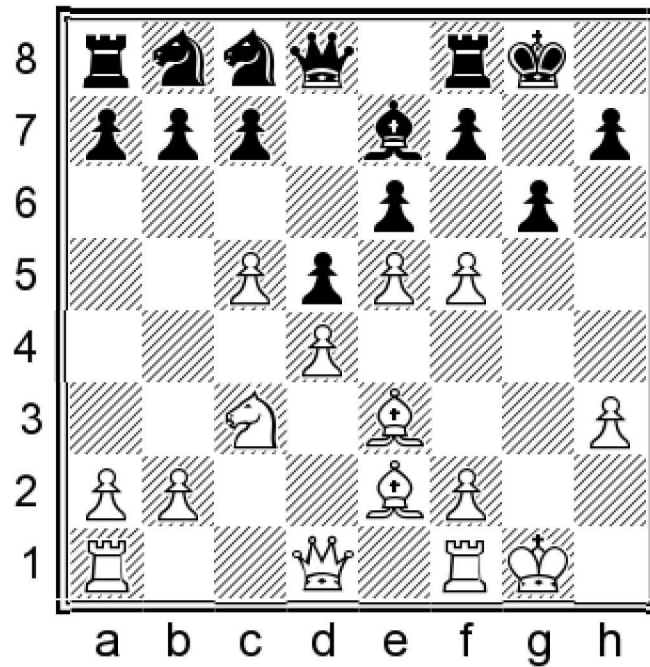


Position after: 13.f4

The most popular and best move available for White, who wants in some cases to continue f4-f5, as mentioned before.

13...Bh4

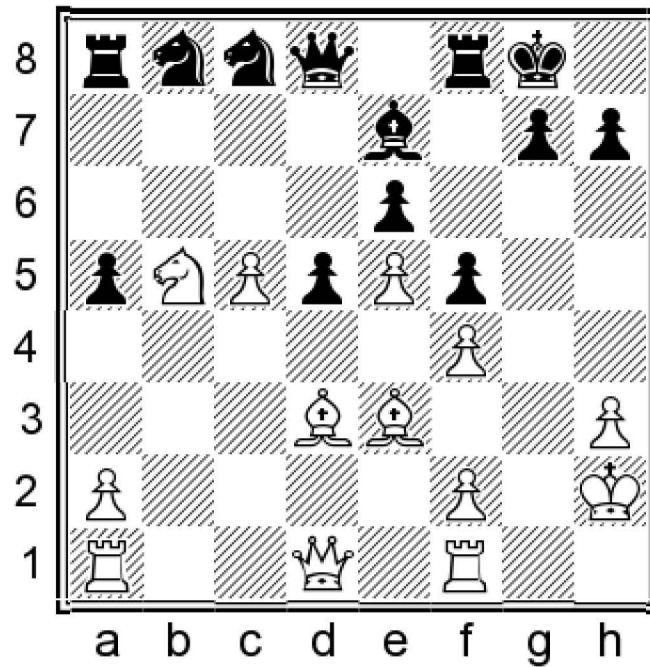
A) After the mistake 13...g6? 14.f5!±



Position after: 14.f5!±

it is already doubtful whether Black could escape even with perfect play.
 14...exf5 [or 14...gxf5 15.Kh1 Kh8 16.Rg1 Bh4 and now the bolt from the blue 17.Ba6!! Nxa6 18.Qh5+– with the crushing idea of Bh6] 15.Qb3 b6
 16.Nxd5 c6 17.Nf4 a5 18.Rfd1 a4 19.Qc3 Qe8 20.Rac1 b5 21.Bf3 a3
 22.b4 g5 23.Nh5 Ra6 24.Kh2 h6 25.Rg1 1-0 Klimakovs, S (2446) –
 Morcillo Holgado, M (2006) ICCF email 2017.

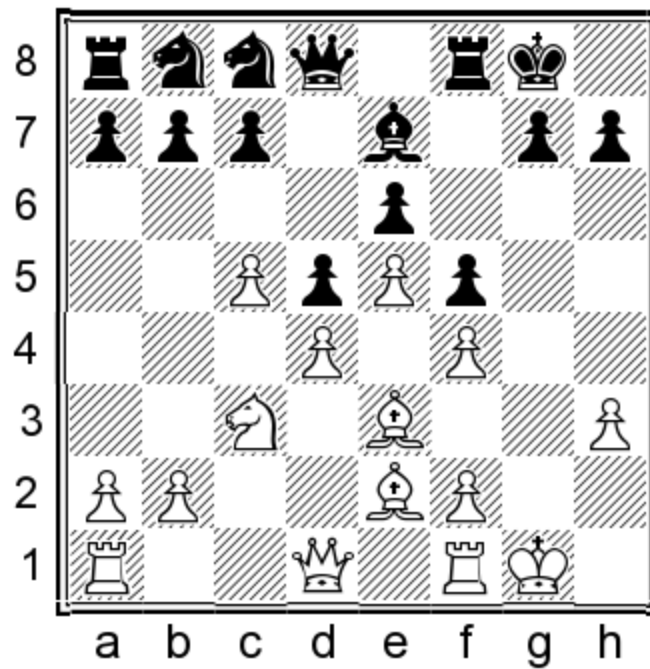
B) Black is struggling in correspondence encounters with 13...c6?!. I won't go into deep details but just give you an illustrative game: 14.Bd3 [14.Kh2!? Koch, C (2221) – Chetvertakoff, V (2204) IECG email 2001] 14...f5 15.Kh2 b6 16.b4 a5 17.b5 bxc5 18.dxc5 cxb5 19.Nxb5±



Position after: 19.Nxb5±

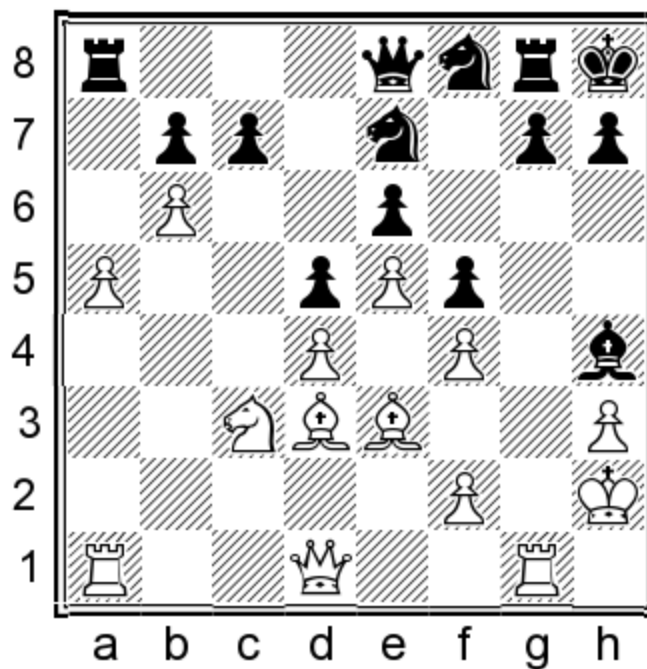
Voronin, A (2275) – Kovalsky, S (2212) ICCF email 2010. The invasion Nd6 will follow soon.

C) The thrust 13...f5?! entails three major drawbacks: (1) Black can't use the f5-square for his knights anymore; (2) he has deprived himself of the lever ...f7-f6; and (3) his opponent can focus on the queenside without losing time on Bd3 and Qg4, and then another queen move somewhere after ...f7-f5, as in other variations.



Position after: 13...f5?!

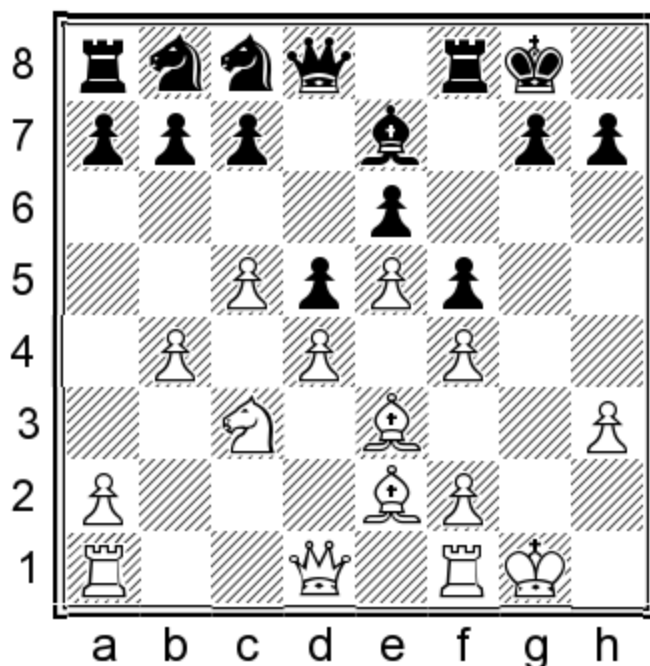
C1) 14.Kh2 Kh8 15.Rg1 [15.b4 should come to the same thing] 15...Rg8
16.b4 Bh4 17.b5 Ne7 18.Bd3 Qe8 19.a4 Nd7 20.a5 Nf8 21.b6 axb6



22.cxb6+–

Position after: 22.cxb6+– Aronian, L (2551) – Nalbandian, T (2465) Yerevan 2000. White can freely operate with all his pieces whereas the enemy units are quite limited in their movements.

C2) 14.b4 Black has tried numerous moves here, but his position remains cramped in all cases. It is therefore pointless to examine them all in detail. Here you have a fresh example as well as one borrowed from a correspondence game.



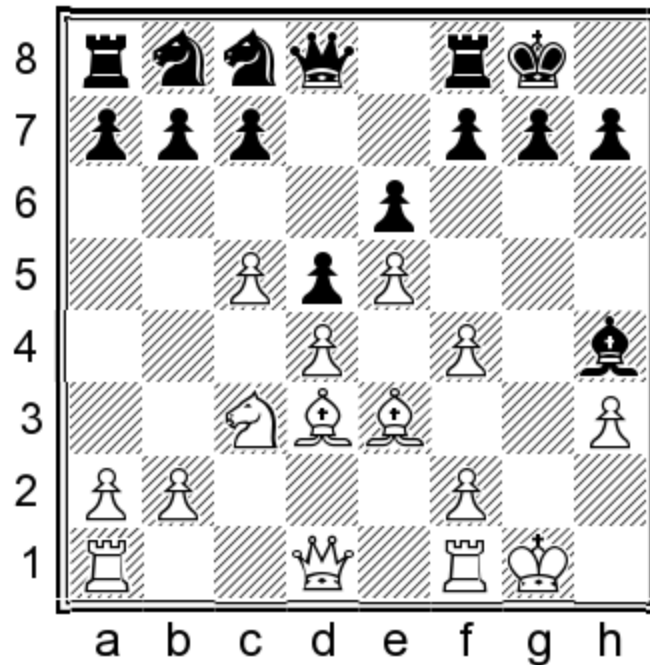
Position after: 14.b4

C2.1) 14...b6 15.Kh2 Bh4 16.Rg1 [16.b5!?] 16...Nc6 17.a3 N6e7 18.Nb1 Ng6 19.Nd2 Nce7 20.Nf3 Kh8 21.b5 Ng8 22.a4 Nh6 23.a5 Be7 24.Qc2 Qd7 25.Ra2 Nh4 26.Nxh4 Bxh4 27.cxb6 axb6 28.a6 Nf7 29.Rc1 Rfc8 30.Qc6+– Quparadze, G – Chighladze, I Cesme 2019.

C2.2) 14...Qe8!? 15.b5 Bd8 16.Qb3 Ne7 17.Kh2 Rf7 18.a4 Nd7 19.Bh5 g6 20.Bf3 Rb8 21.a5+– Dueball, J – Schifferdecker, W Germany 1980. The “+–” evaluation is from the machine. It may seem exaggerated, but Black totally lacks counterplay and can only wait for a slow death.

C2.3) 14...c6 15.Kh1 b6 16.Rg1 a5 17.b5± Eiben, P – Bazela, E corr 2001.

14.Bd3



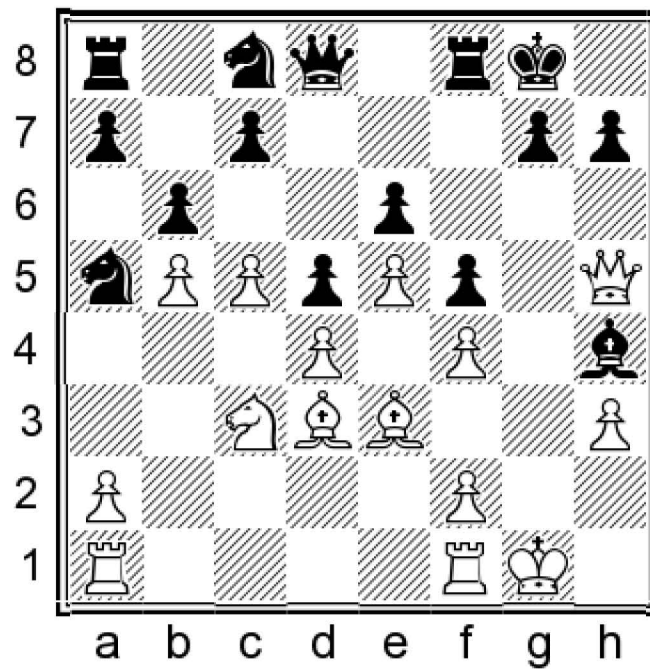
Position after: 14.Bd3

14...g6

A) 14...Ne7? 15.Qg4 Nf5 16.Bxf5 exf5 17.Qxf5± Black had absolutely nothing for the lost pawn, Blanco Gramajo, C (2579) – Machycek, L (2430) ICCF email 2007.

B) 14...f5 Now White has two main alternatives.

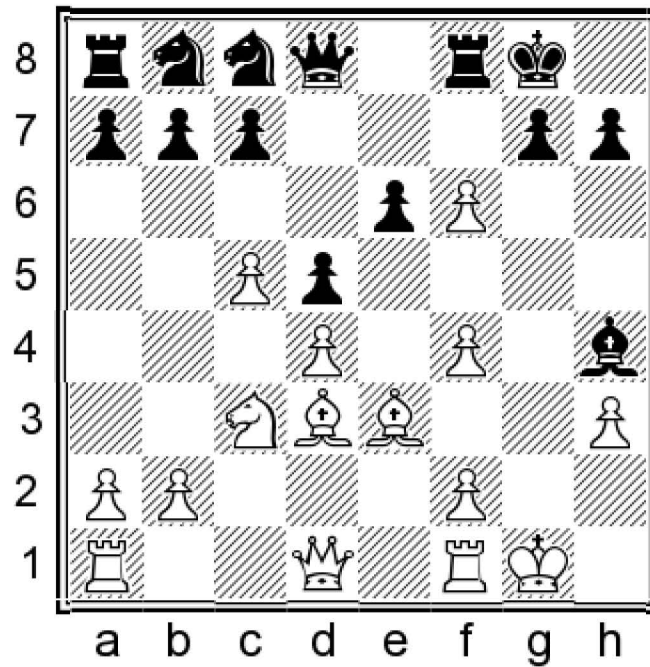
B1) 15.b4 Nc6 [15...a6 is more cautious, and after 16.a4 Nc6 17.b5 Nb4 looks acceptable by Black's standards in this line.] 16.b5 Na5 17.Qh5 b6



Position after: 17...b6

18.Na4 Matic, D (2380) – Chetvertakoff, V (2194) IECG email 2001. This was very pleasant for White but 18.Kh2! would have been more punchy, the point being 18...bxc5 19.dxc5 d4 20.Rad1±. For instance, 20...dxc3 21.Bxf5 exf5 22.Rxd8 Bxd8 23.Bd4. Black is doing alright from a material point of view but his troops are disorganized.

B2) 15.exf6

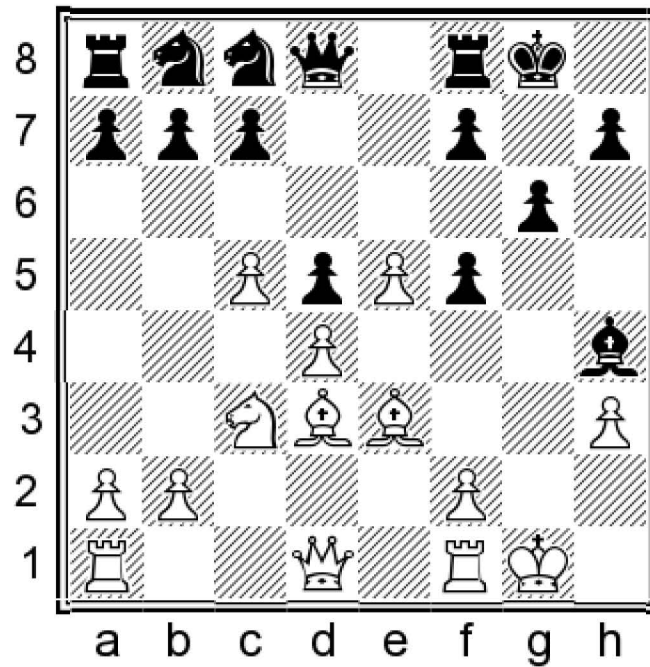


Position after: 15.exf6

15...g6 [Here or on the next move Black should have tried ...Qxf6, but it is unclear whether the ensuing White advantage is bearable. 15...Qxf6 16.f5 Ne7 17.fxe6 Nbc6 18.Qg4^{2/±}] 16.f5! gxf5 [16...exf5? 17.Qb3+–] 17.Kh1 Bxf6 18.Rg1+ Kh8 19.Ne2 Nc6 20.Nf4[±] Simmelink, J (2241) – Chetvertakoff, V (2204) IECG email 2001.

15.Qg4

15.f5!? exf5

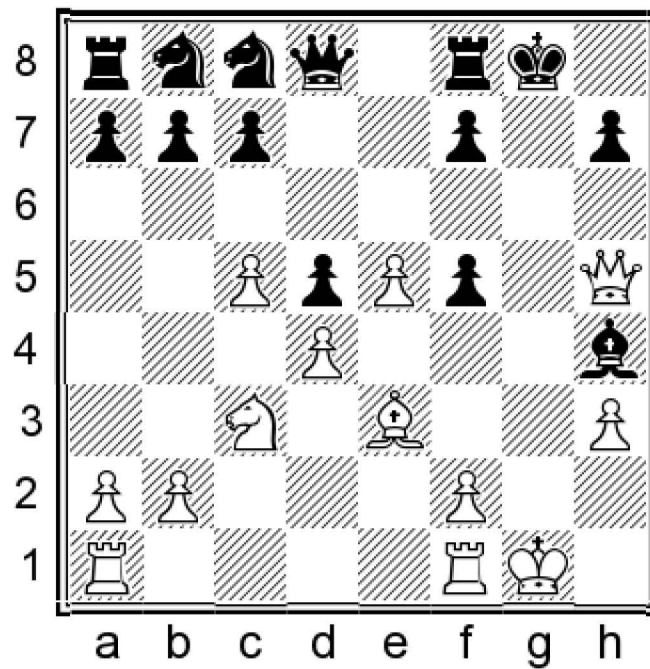


Position after: 15...exf5

A) The young Grischuk chose the wrong direction in his 1996 Menorca game with Ganguly, and found himself in trouble following 16.Qb3? Ne7 17.Qxb7 Nbc6μ. In addition to 18...Rb8 Black also threatens ...f5-f4.

B) 16.Bh6?! Re8 doesn't trouble Black: 17.Bxf5? gxf5 18.Qh5 Re6!μ.

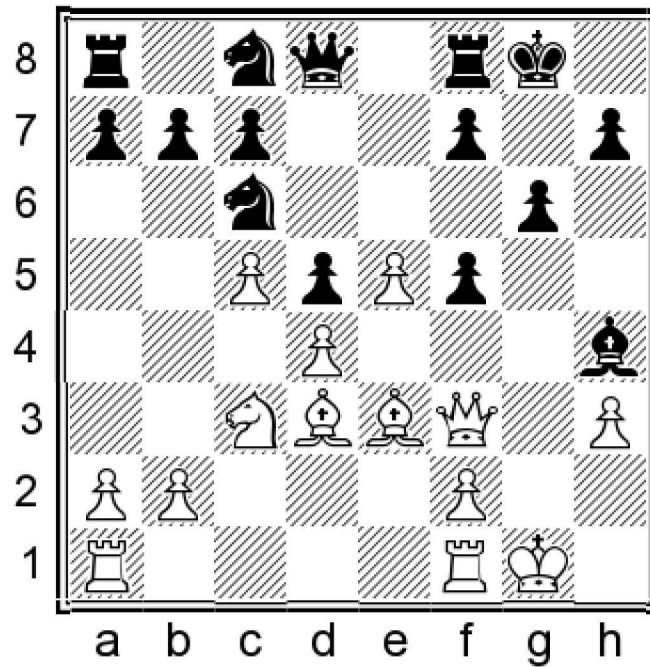
C) Nobody has dared to sacrifice the bishop with 16.Bxf5 gxf5 17.Qh5 so far, but the engine claims it is worth being investigated.



Position after: 17.Qh5

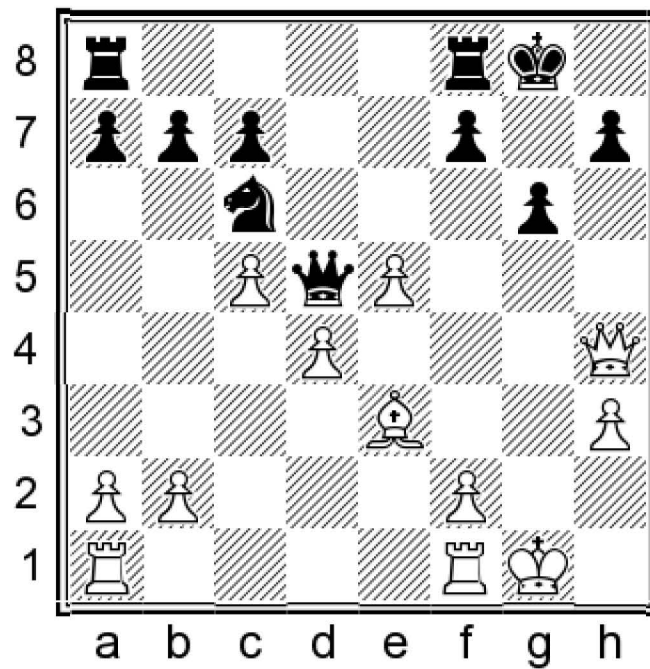
Play may continue 17...a5! 18.c6!! and now both 18...Ra6 19.cxb7 Rg6+ 20.Kh1 and 18...Nxc6 19.Kh1 N8e7 20.Qxh4 Ng6 21.Qg3 f6 are unclear.

D) 16.Qf3 Nc6 [the greedy 16...c6? would be harshly punished by 17.Bh6! Re8? 18.Bxf5±]



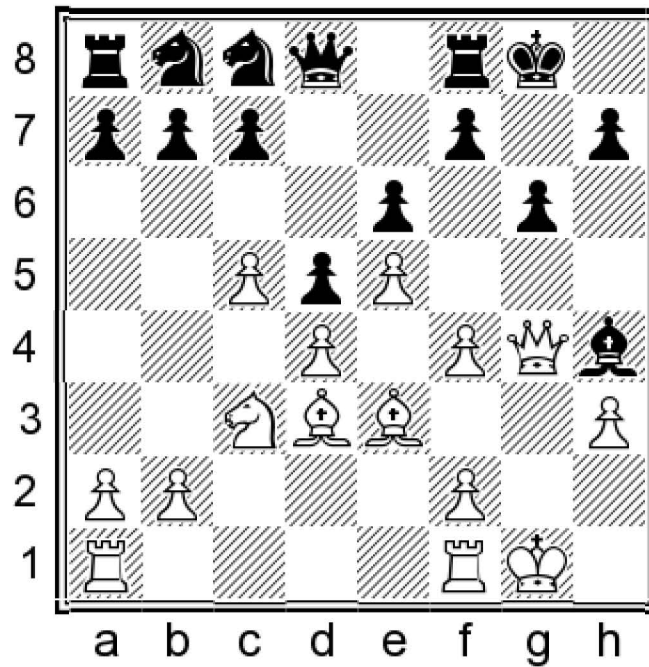
Position after: 16...Nc6

After 16...Nc6 White has to choose between taking back his pawn with 17.Nxd5 and playing in a positional fashion, with either 17.Qf4 or 17.Kh1. In the latter case Black is rather tied down, ...N8e7 or ...N6e7 for example running into 18.Qf4!. 17.Nxd5 [17.Kh1 Kh8 is possibly not best for Black because of 18.Qf4!, rather than 18.Rg1?! f6 19.e6 N8e7∞ Maeurer, C (2294) – Schmitt, A (2318) Wuerttemberg 2001.] 17...N8e7 18.Bc4 Nxd5 19.Bxd5 f4 20.Qxf4 Qxd5 21.Qxh4



Position after: 21.Qxh4

Zarnicki, P (2497) – Labollita, M (2199) Buenos Aires 1999 arrived at this position. Now rather than 21...f5 22.exf6 Rae8² the computer suggests that 21...Rfd8 would have kept the balance despite Black's pawn deficit and his kingside weaknesses on the dark squares.



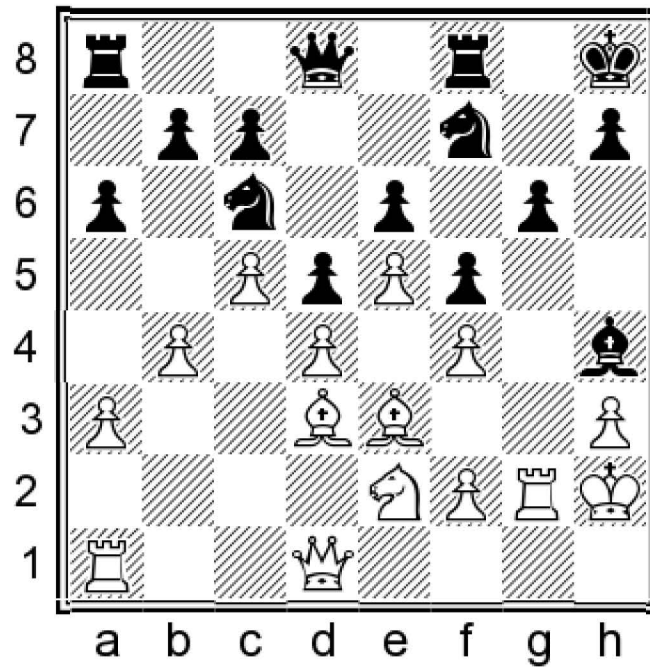
Position after: 15.Qg4

15...Kh8

On principle (well, as I personally understand the line!) Black would prefer to keep the f5-square vacant for a knight, but I saw nothing really wrong with 15...f5!?. At any rate this is how the game Hendriks, W – Bosch, J Netherlands 1996 continued: 16.Qe2 Nc6 17.a3 Kh8 18.b4 a6 19.Kh1 N8e7 20.Qd2 Ng8 21.Ne2 Nh6 22.Ng1 Nf7 23.Nf3².

16.Nb1

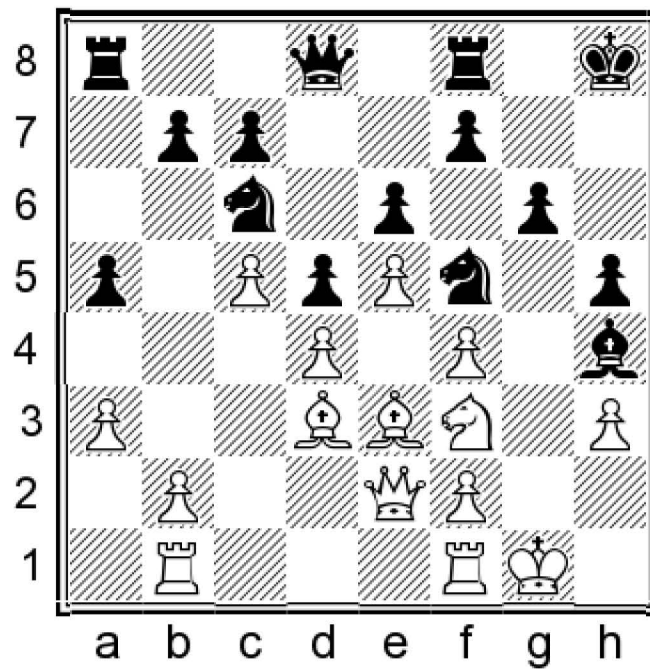
16.Kh2 Nc6 17.Rg1 f5 18.Qd1 N8e7 19.a3 Ng8 20.b4 a6 21.Rg2 Nh6 22.Ne2 Nf7 Velicka, P (2442) – Peralta, F (2505) Solsona 2003.



Position after: 22...Nf7

Black has used the same typical regrouping as in Solozhenkin – Bagirov and Hendriks – Bosch. I am skeptical as to whether this ideal formation could enable him to play for a win, with a subsequent ...g6-g5, but at least he isn't running into any danger in the near future.

16...Nc6 17.Nd2 h5 18.Qe2 N8e7 19.Nf3 Nf5 20.Rab1 a5 21.a3²

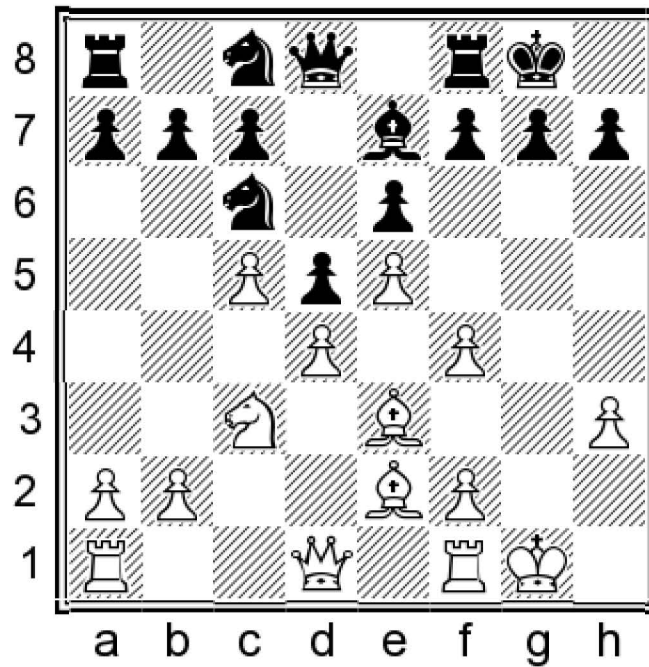


Position after: 21.a3²

Kosashvili, Y (2500) – Zilberman, Y (2475) Rishon Le Zion 1993. White will try to slowly build up on the queenside.

1) 7.0-0 with 10.Be3 d5 11.c5 Bxf3 12.gxf3 Nc8 13.f4 Nc6

1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.Nf3 Bg4 5.Be2 e6 6.c4 Nb6 7.0-0 Be7 8.Nc3 0-0 9.h3 Bh5 10.Be3 d5 11.c5 Bxf3 12.gxf3 Nc8 13.f4 Nc6

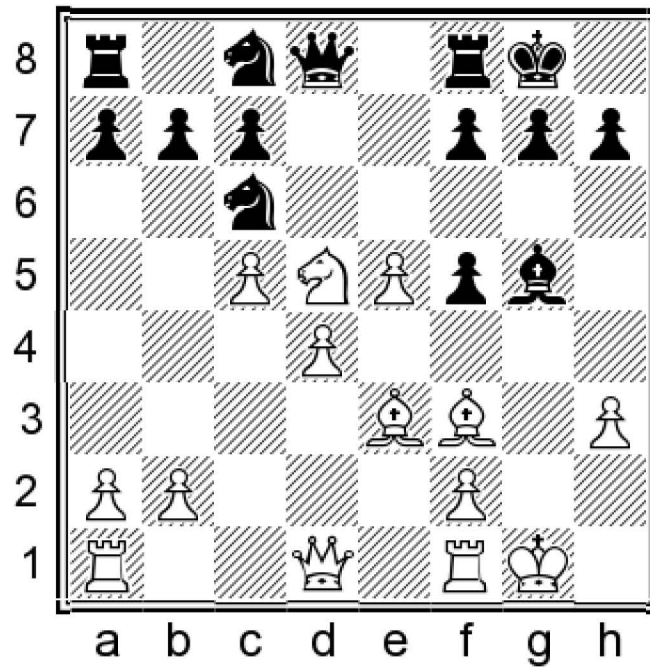


Position after: 13...Nc6

14.Bd3

A) 14.Qc2?! allows instant equalization. 14...Bh4 15.a3 N8e7 16.Bd3 g6 17.Kh2 f6,, Edouard, R (2634) – Kovalenko, I (2515) Moscow 2011. Black's last move is often risky but given his opponent's unfortunate 14th move it proved correct here.

B) 14.f5!? isn't supposed to be the most testing, since Black gets instant counterplay once the position opens up. That being said, the computer shows a slight preference for White everywhere in the variations that follow. 14...exf5 [14...Bg5?! 15.fxe6 fxe6 16.Bg4±] 15.Bf3 Bg5 [or 15...f4 16.Bxf4 Bg5 17.Bg3 N8e7 18.Bg4 Sax, G (2580) – Ivanchuk, V (2660) Tilburg 1989] 16.Nxd5.



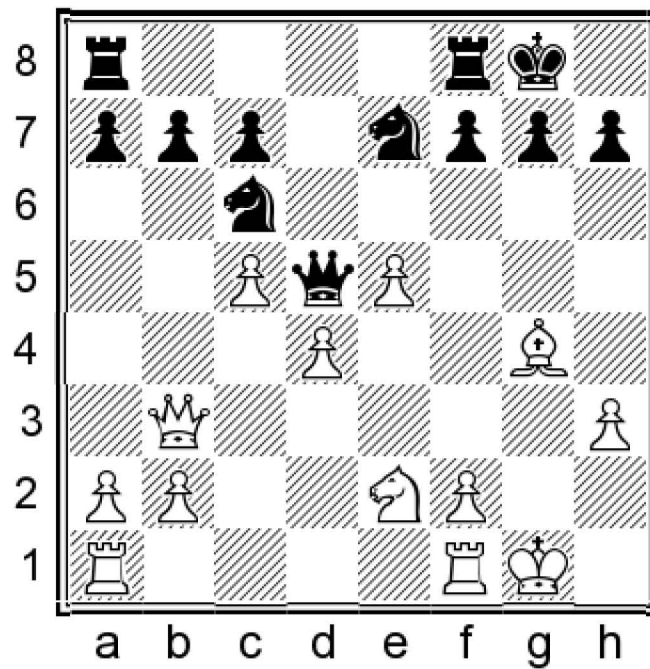
Position after: 16.Nxd5

At this juncture Black has three options of roughly the same value.

B1) 16...Rb8 17.Qd2 Bxe3 18.fxe3 and now either 18...N6e7 Batakovs, O (2453) – Louro, E (2313) ICCF corr 2000, or 18...N8e7 Pecka, J (2385) – Pesa, L (2321) ICCF 2012.

B2) 16...Bxe3 17.fxe3 N8e7 18.Nxe7+ Nxe7 19.Bxb7 Rb8 20.Bg2 Rxb2² Cimicki, D (2358) – Vlasveld, W (2439) ICCF email 2007.

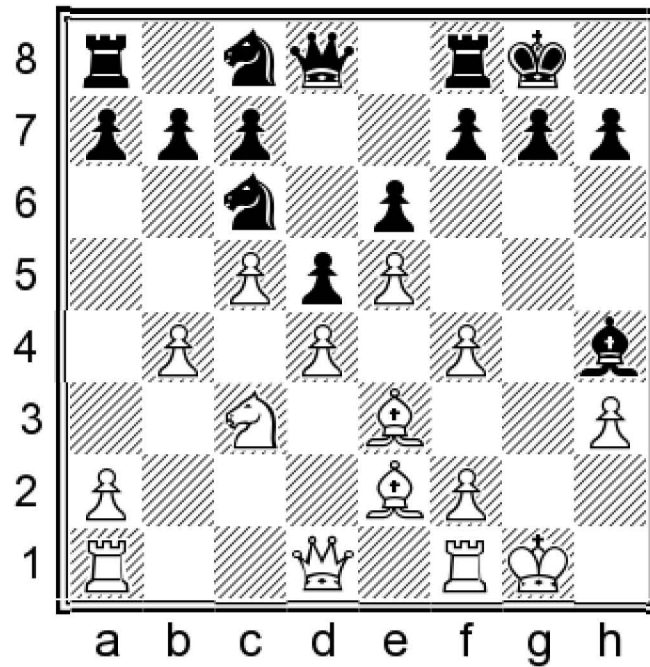
B3) 16...f4 17.Bxf4 Bxf4 18.Nxf4 N8e7 Aseev, K (2545) – Bagirov, V (2470) Berlin 1990 [18...Nxd4!?] 19.Ne2 Qd7© 20.Bg4 Qd5 21.Qb3 Berlinger, G (2498) – Hebels, A (2485) ICCF email 2009.



Position after: 21.Qb3

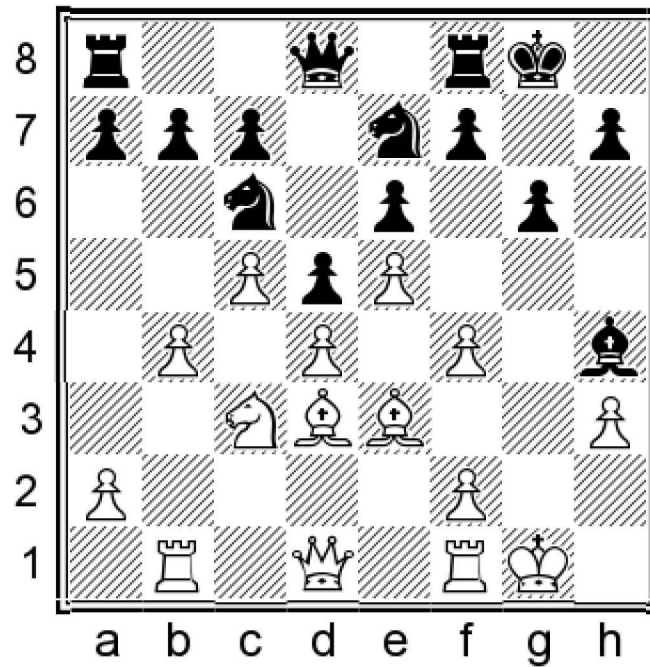
Now rather than 21...Qxb3 22.axb3, Black should have tried 21...Nxd4 22.Nxd4 Qxd4 23.e6 Ng6 24.exf7+ Kh8∞.

C) 14.b4!? Bh4 [14...f5? 15.Qa4! Bh4 16.b5 N6e7 17.Kh2 Kh8 18.Qd1! Ng6 19.a4 b6 20.a5± Tiviakov, S – Castelfranchi, C St Vincent 1998. Black is going nowhere on the kingside while White's operations on the other flank are already well advanced.]



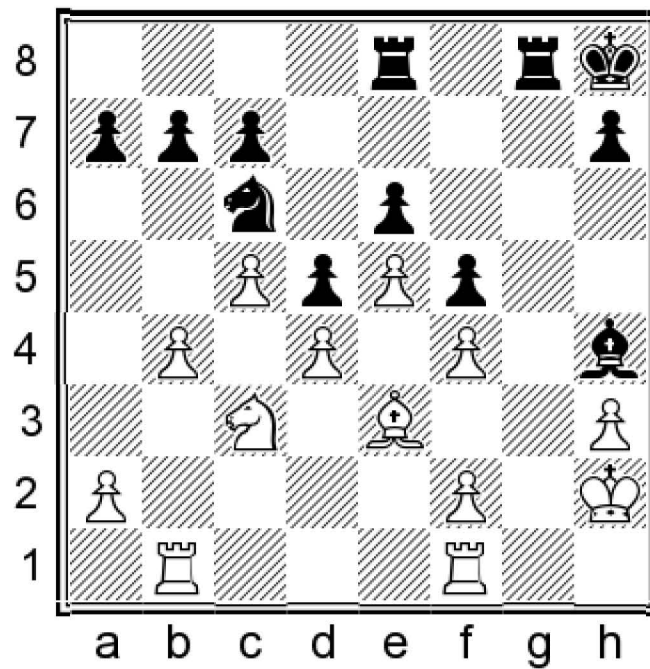
Position after: 14...Bh4

C1) White can opt for the slower 15.Rb1, to deny his opponent the possibility of b5 ...Na5. Then besides 15...a6 Black can continue with the customary transfer of one knight to f5. 15...N8e7 [Or 15...N6e7 16.Bd3 g6 and so on.] 16.Bd3 g6



Position after: 16...g6

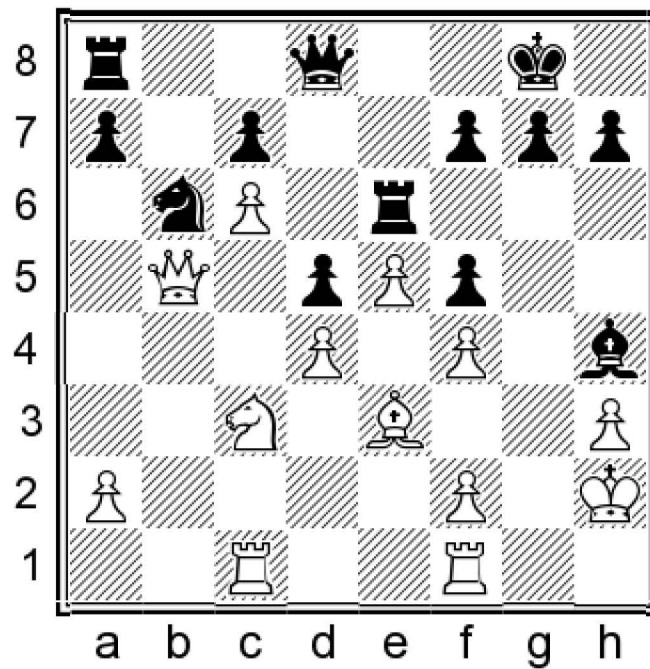
17.Qf3 [17.Qg4 Nf5 18.Bxf5 exf5 19.Qf3 Ne7 Razuvaev, Y – Alburt, L Ashkhabad 1978. In comparison with Galkin – Socko the knight is a long way from reaching its ideal outpost e6, but that isn't crucial. The game is balanced.] 17...Nf5 18.Bxf5 gxf5 19.Qh5 Kh8 20.Kh2 Rg8 21.Qxf7 Qe8 22.Qxe8 Rxe8



Position after: 22...Raxe8

Tiviakov, S – Velicka, P Cheliabinsk 1990. White is up a pawn but he remains with a silly bishop, so it is highly unlikely he can make use of his symbolic advantage.

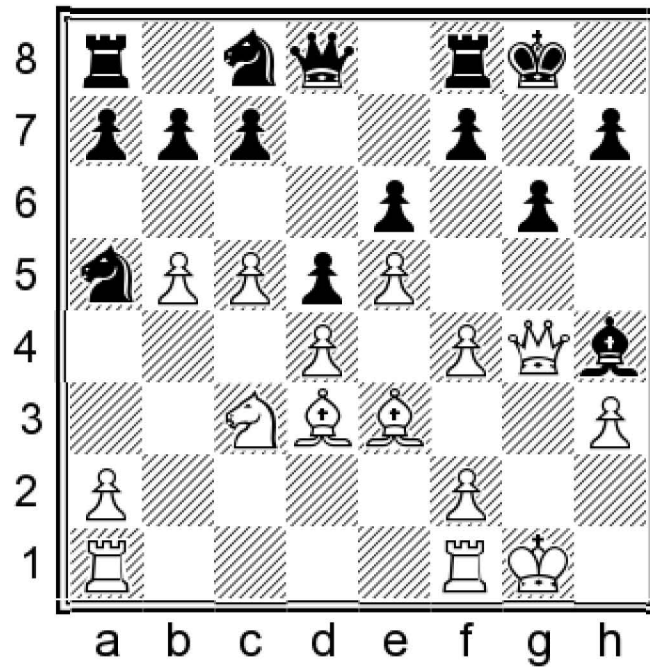
C2) 15.Kh2 N8e7 16.b5 Na5 17.Bd3 Nf5 18.c6 bxc6 19.Bxf5 exf5
20.Qa4 Nc4 21.bxc6 Re8 22.Qb5 Nb6 23.Rac1 Re6



Position after: 23...Re6

Black was a tad better here in Tiviakov, S (2654) – Tischbierek, R (2422) Cape Town 2013. Of course numerous improvements can be found along the way.

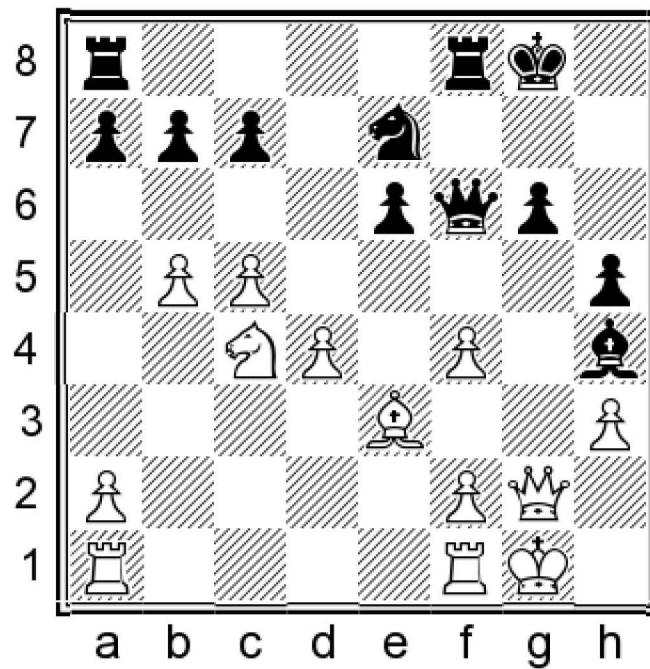
C3) 15.b5 Na5 16.Bd3 g6 17.Qg4



Position after: 17.Qg4

17...f5 [17...h5?! looks more shaky. 18.Qf3 Ne7 19.Kh2 f5 – 19...c6 20.Rg1! is nasty – 20.Rg1 Kf7 Dorfman, J – Bagirov, V Ordzhonikidze 1978. Black held that particular game but at this stage his position was suspicious.]

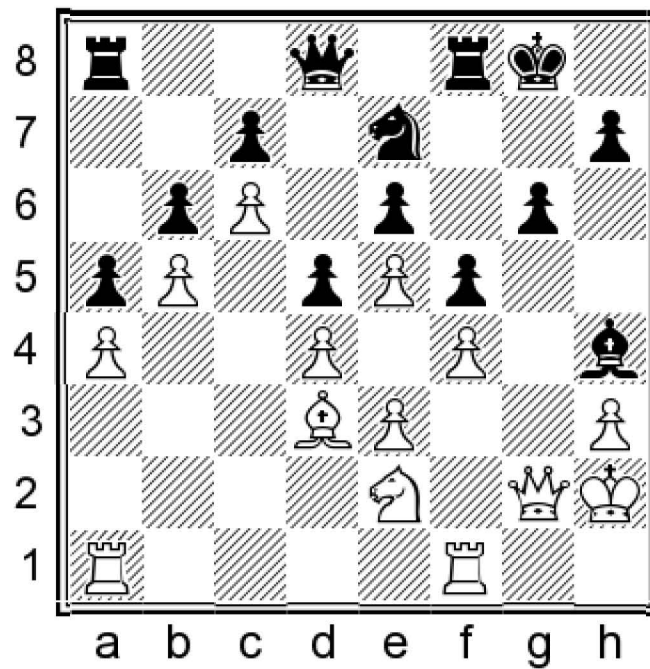
C3.1) 18.exf6 Qxf6 19.Nb1!? C&K mention this cybernetic option, saying they don't trust it. True, after for instance 19...Nc4 20.Bxc4 dxc4 21.Nd2 h5 22.Qg2 Ne7 23.Nxc4



Position after: 23.Nxc4

Black has decent compensation, but everything isn't rosy in his camp and the position offers mutual chances.

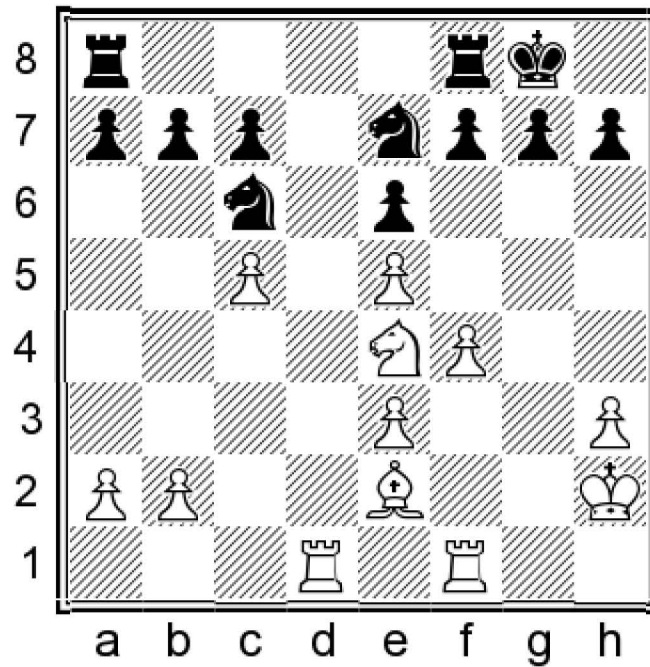
C3.2) 18.Qg2 Ne7 19.Kh2 b6 20.c6 a6 21.a4 Nc4 22.Ne2 Nxe3 23.fxe3 a5=



Position after: 23...a5=

McDonald, N – Palatnik, S Hastings 2000. It's difficult to imagine either side winning here. After Ng1-f3xh4 followed by a queen-swap on g3 Black would just put his king on f7 and block the kingside with a timely ...h7-h5.

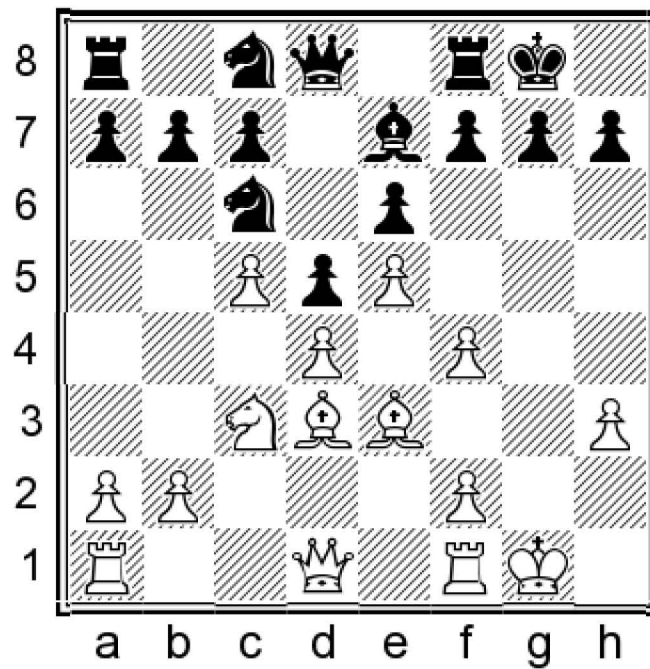
D) 14.Kh2 Bxc5!? 15.dxc5 d4 16.Ne4 dxe3 17.fxe3 Qxd1 18.Raxd1 N8e7



Position after: 18...N8e7

This was Motylev, A (2676) – Appel, R (2535) Germany 2014, when the engine claims that 19.Kg2 would have remained advantageous for White even in the event of all four rooks vanishing. 19...Rad8 20.Kf2 Rxd1 21.Rxd1 Rd8 22.Rxd8+ Nxd8 I believe Black should be able to hold that, even if he might still suffer a bit.

Time to return to 14.Bd3.



Position after: 14.Bd3

14...g6

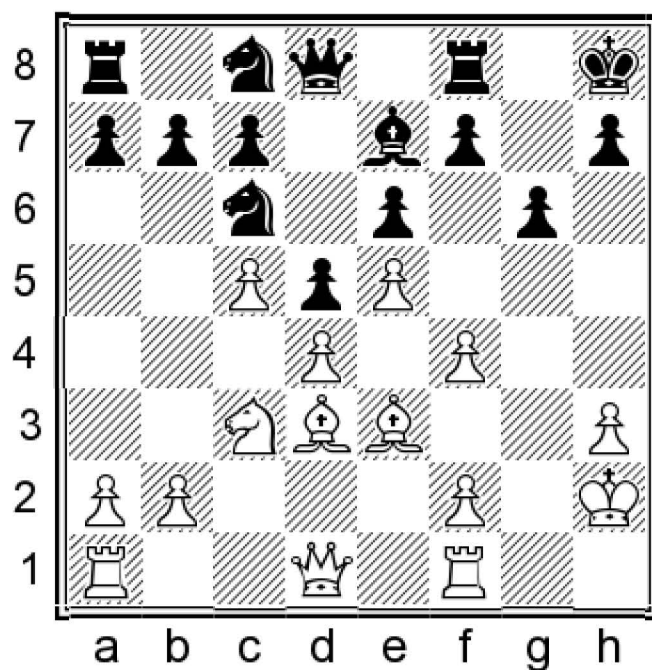
14...f5!?

15.Kh2

15.f5?! The same position exists with the knight still on b8 and the bishop on h4. The difference is 15...exf5 16.Qf3 Bxc5! ∞ .

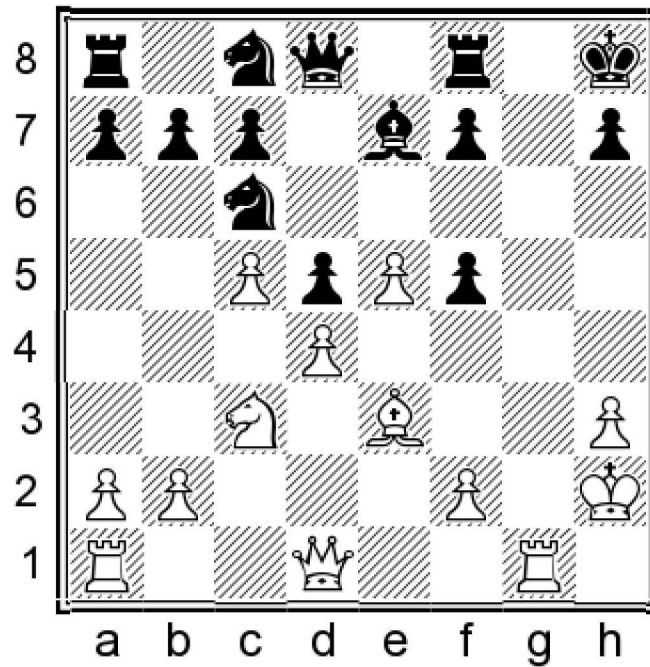
15...f5

15...Kh8?



Position after: 15...Kh8?

16.f5!! [16.Qb3 Bh4 17.Qxb7 N8e7 18.a3 Rb8 19.Qa6 Rxb2 Zeihen, P (2285) – Bendana Aragon, J (2255) ICCF email 2017. This was also in White's favor, but less incisive.] 16...exf5 17.Bxf5! gxf5 [Declining the invitation with 17...Bg5 18.Bg4 f5 19.f4 Bh4 20.Bf3 N8e7 21.Rb1±, as in Conde Poderoso, A (2293) – Ishemguzhin, I (2156) ICCF email 2017, doesn't solve Black's problems.] 18.Rg1



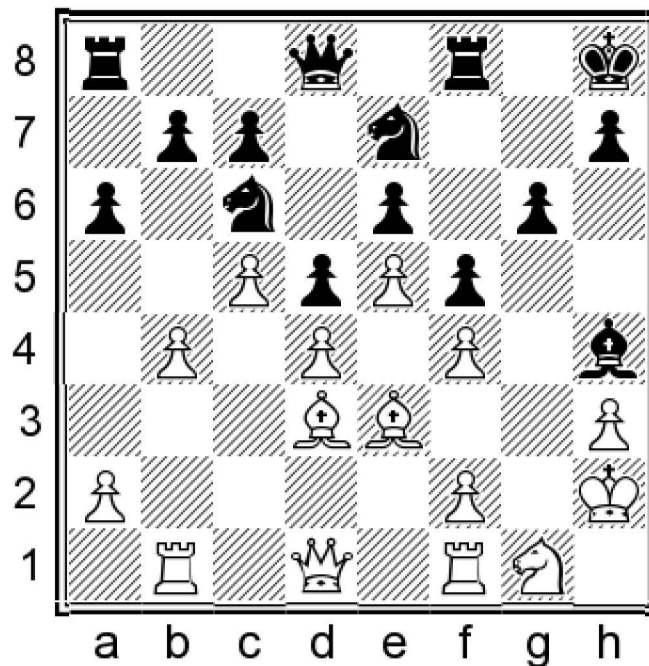
Position after: 18.Rg1

18...f4 [Or 18...Rg8 19.Rxg8+ Qxg8 20.Qf3±/+– with similar consequences.] 19.Bxf4 The rest needs no comment since Black is fundamentally lost. 19...Rg8 20.Rxg8+ Qxg8 21.Qd2 f6 22.Rg1 Qf7 23.Bh6 fxe5 24.Bg7+ Qxg7 25.Rxg7 Kxg7 26.dxe5 Nxe5 27.Qf4 Nc6 28.Qxc7 Rb8 29.b4 d4 30.Nd5 Kf8 31.Kg2 1-0 Mulligan, B – Morcillo Holgado, M email 2017.

16.Rb1

Of course not 16.exf6? Bxf6³.

16...Bh4 17.b4 a6 18.Ne2 Kh8 19.Ng1 N8e7



Position after: 19...N8e7

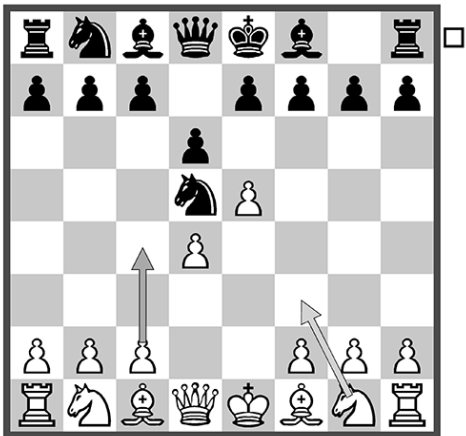
And we will get the kind of position we have already seen, where Black transfers his knight to f7. Black is ultra-solid but basically has to just sit and wait.

Conclusion: The only way that I can see for White to prevent his opponent from reaching the setup including ...g6, ...f5, ...Bh4, ...Nc6 and ...Nf7 is to rush with the (temporary) double-edged pawn sacrifice f4-f5. If he doesn't, it is unlikely that he can break through on the kingside, and though he remains better due to his space advantage, how to progress on the queenside without making any concession isn't so obvious. For instance, if after b4 ...a6 White goes a2-a4, then ...a6-a5 may prove annoying. From the black perspective the reason why I'd advocate the afore-mentioned setup is that Black seems to have enough room for his pieces, which is doubtful when he plays with ...c6 rather than ...Nc6 for instance. Another important nuance is to make sure the pawn sacrifice f4-f5 is only "interesting". Throughout this chapter there are quite a few positions where it revealed itself to be lethal.

Chapter 10

Bonus Lines

1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6



Chapter Guide

Chapter 10 – Bonus Lines

This chapter regroups lines of interest which I don't recommend: the first one is just bad while I have offered satisfactory alternatives to each of the others.

1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6

a) 4.c4 Nb6 5.f4 dxe5 6.fxe5 c5 7.d5 e6 with 10.--

b) 4.c4 Nb6 5.f4 dxe5 6.fxe5 c5 7.d5 e6 with 10.d6 Nc6 11.Nf3, 11.Nb5

c) 4.c4 Nb6 5.f4 dxe5 6.fxe5 c5 7.d5 e6 with 10.d6 Nc6 11.Bf4

d) 4.c4 Nb6 5.f4 dxe5 6.fxe5 Nc6 (Summary) e) 4.c4 Nb6 5.f4 Bf5 (Compilation) f) Voronezh Ending with 11.c5

g) Voronezh Ending with 11.Qxd8

h) 4.Nf3 dxe5 5.Nxe5 Nd7 6.Nxf7 Kxf7 7.Qh5+ Ke6 8.g3

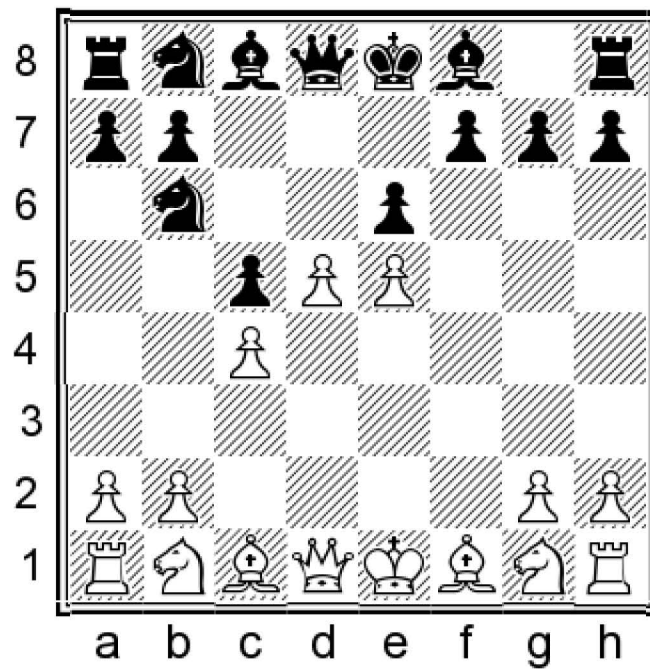
i) 4.Nf3 -- (according to Negi) j) 4.Nf3 g6 5.Bc4 Nb6 6.Bb3 Bg7 7.Ng5 e5 8.Qf3 (according to Negi) k) 4.Nf3 Bg4 5.Be2 e6 6.c4 Nb6 7.0-0 with 11.c5 (according to Negi) l) 4.Nf3 Bg4 5.Be2 e6 6.c4 Nb6 7.0-0 with 11.cxd5 (according to Negi)

a) 4.c4 Nb6 5.f4 dxe5 6.fxe5 c5 7.d5 e6 with 10.--

1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.c4 Nb6 5.f4

The two main approaches consist of 5...g6 and 5...dxe5 6.fxe5 Nc6 (see the chapter about the Four Pawns Attack), but we will study a third alternative, a somewhat suspicious one.

5...dxe5 6.fxe5 c5 7.d5 e6?



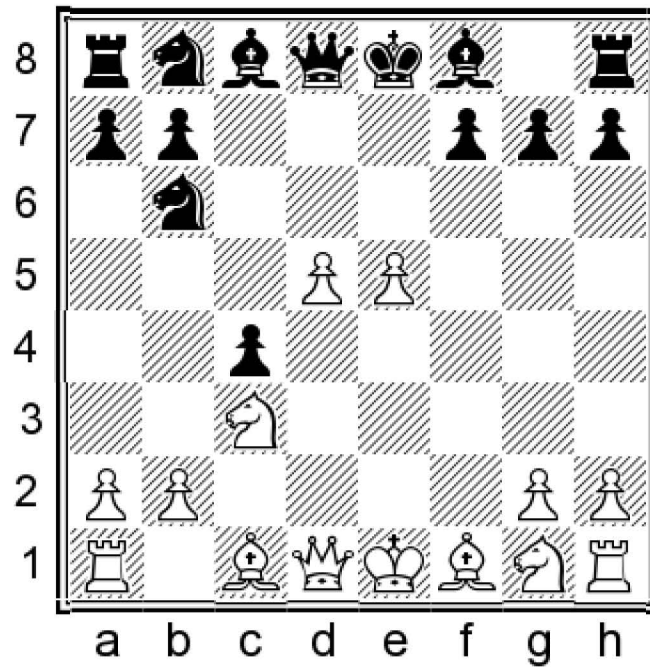
Position after: 7...e6?

Threatening at the same time 8...Qh4+ and 8...exd5, which forces White's next natural move. The alternative consists of putting the dark-squared bishop in fianchetto.

8.Nc3

8.d6?? is a blunder known to leave Black winning after 8...Qh4+ 9.g3 Qe4+ 10.Qe2 Qxh1 11.Nf3 Nc6 12.Nbd2 Nd7!—+ followed by ...Ndxе5 which will free the cornered queen.

8...exd5 9.cxd5 c4!



Position after: 9...c4!

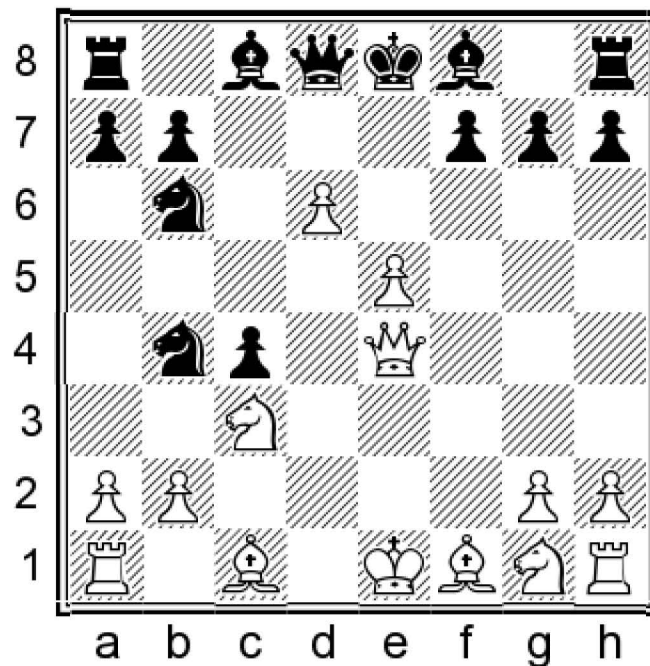
Preparing the exit of the dark-squared bishop to either b4 or c5, which White's major try hinders.

10.Nf3

A) 10.e6 Bc5 11.exf7+ Kxf7 Both sides have concerns about their respective kings' safety.

B) In the event of 10.a3 Black would place his bishop on a nice square before its diagonal gets shut down. 10...Bc5 11.Nf3 Now all three moves 11...Bf5N, 11...Bg4 and 11...0-0 give reciprocal chances.

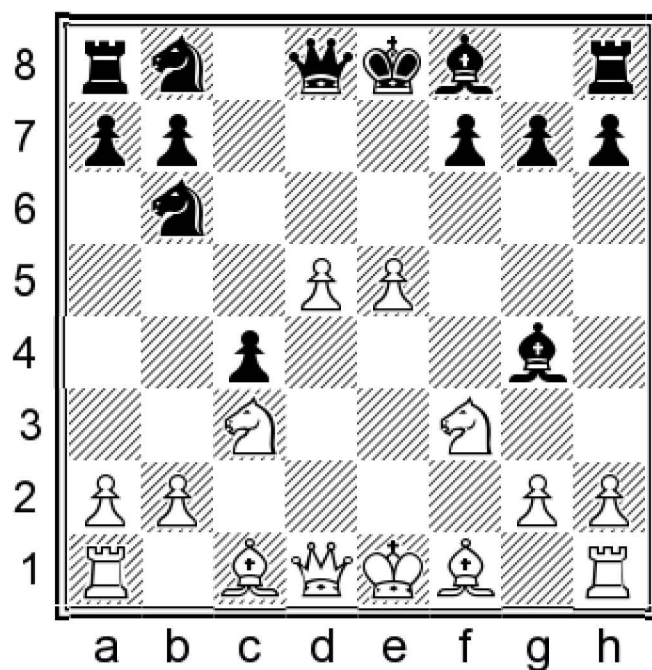
C) 10.Qd4 Nc6 11.Qe4 Nb4 12.d6 [12.Be3 g6 is fine for Black, who threatens 13...Bf5]



Position after: 12.d6

12...Bd7! This move, intending ...Bc6 in some cases, has been played once only and could be more to the point than what books have suggested so far. [12...g6? 13.Bxc4 Nxc4 14.Qxc4 Nc2+ 15.Ke2! Nxa1 16.Nd5 Bg7 17.Nc7+ Kf8 18.Nxa8 White stood clearly better in Vitouch, A (1920) – Hacker, A (2030) Austria 1998, but 18.Nf3! would have been even stronger.] 13.Bxc4? [13.a3!?!; 13.Qf4!?!] 13...Nxc4 14.Qxc4 Nc2+μ Zvolanek, J (1762) – Soukup, A (1946) Plzen 2001, with a much better version of 12...g6.

10...Bg4?!



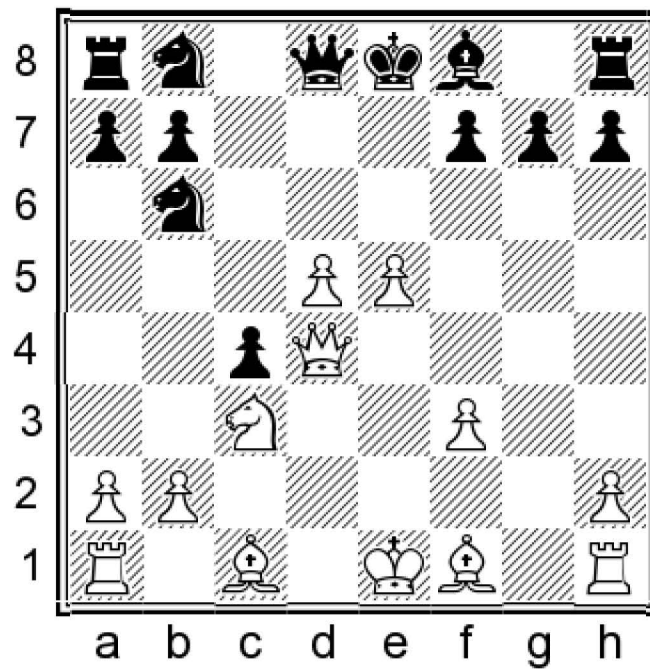
Position after: 10...Bg4?!

This allows 11.d6 Nc6 12.Bf4 – see subchapter ‘c’.

11.Be2!?

It doesn't seem like Black can equalize after this quiet move.

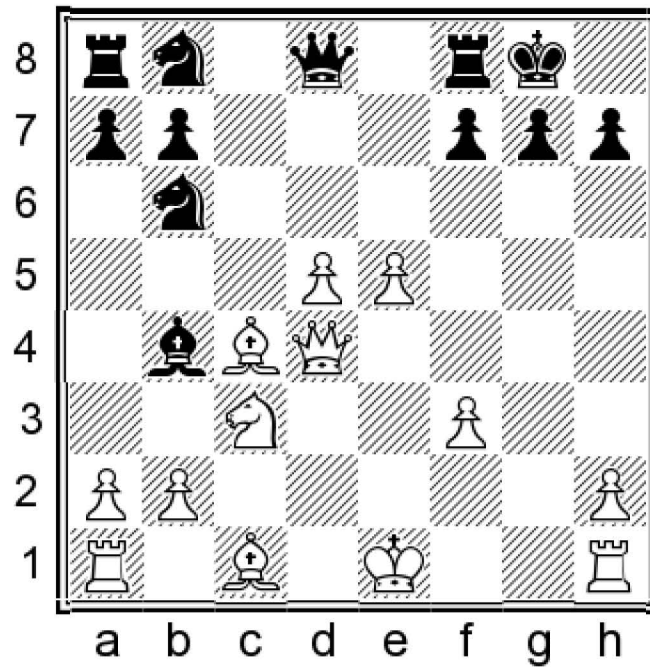
11.Qd4?! This queen move, on the other hand, has been neutralized, or supposedly so. Indeed, the position is so wealthy that checking every single interesting white try is a huge task. At any rate, it may lead to beautiful tactical fireworks starting with 11...Bxf3 12.gxf3.



Position after: 12.gxf3

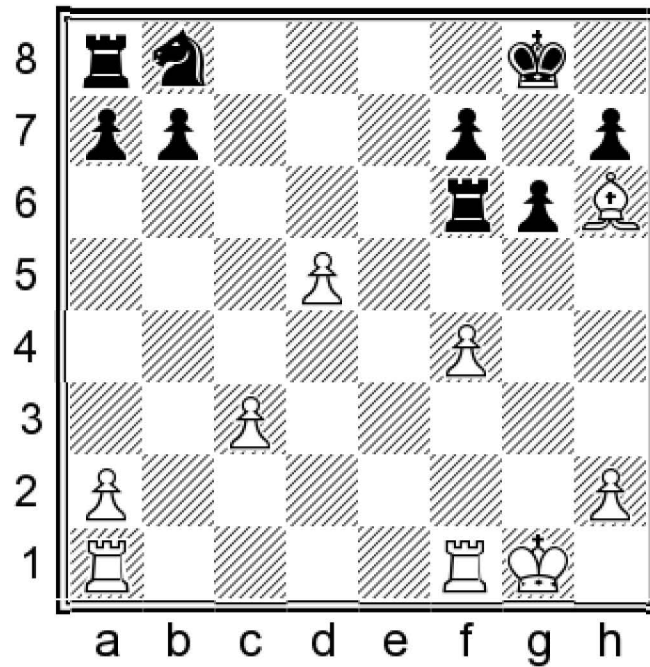
A) In the event of 12...Nc6? 13.Qe4 Nb4 White would be close to winning after either 14.Be3+– or simply 14.d6+–.

B) 12...Bb4 This is mandatory. 13.Bxc4 0-0



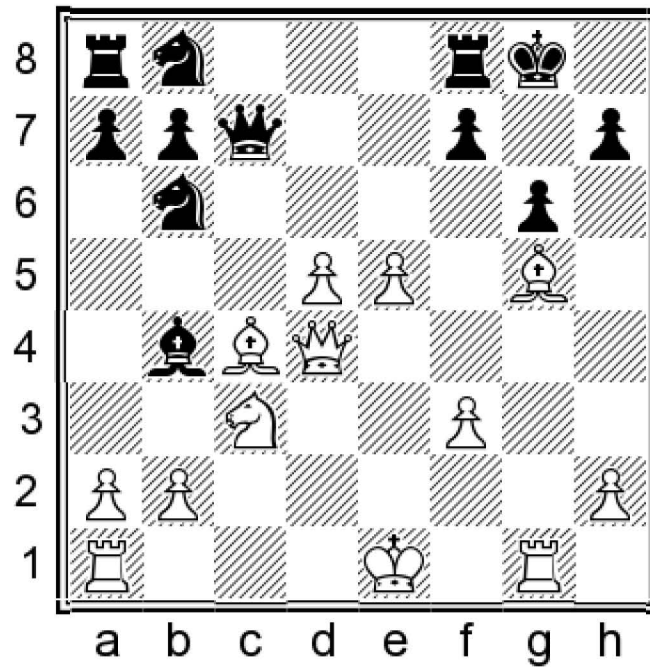
Position after: 13...0-0

14.Rg1 [The rarer 14.Bh6!? could be superior. I am not sure if Black has anything more appealing than the following sequence, which results in a slightly worse ending: 14...Nxc4 15.Qg4 g6 16.Qxc4 Bxc3+ 17.bxc3 Re8 18.Qd4 Qf6 19.0-0 Rxe5 20.f4 Rf5 21.Qxf6 Rxf6.



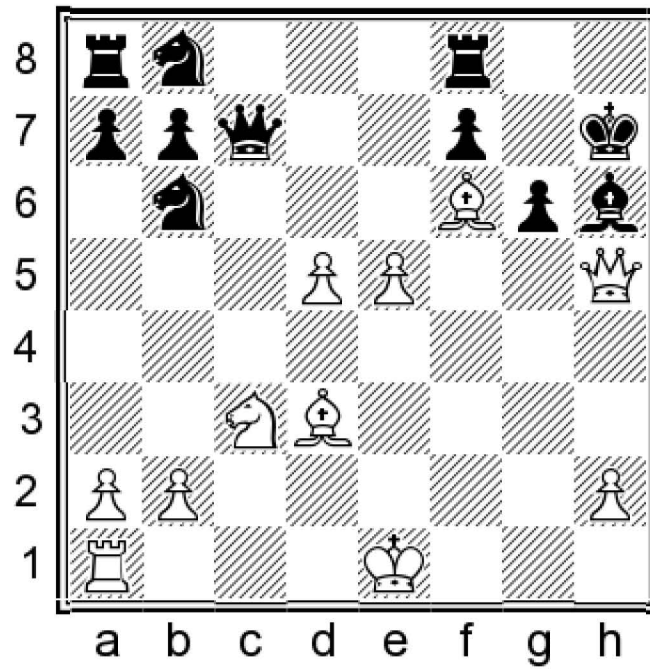
Position after: 21...Rxf6

The bishop on h6 is quite unpleasant for Black, but given the reduced material on the board I guess it is possible to dig further and find a clean way to draw.] 14...g6 [Black quickly collapsed in the stem game Ljubojevic, L – Honfi, K, Cacak 1970, choosing the faulty 14...Qc7? and resigning after 15.e6 f6 16.Bh6 Qxc4 17.Rxg7+ Kh8 18.Rg8+ Kxg8 19.Qg1+.] 15.Bg5! [15.Bh6? Nc6 16.Qe4 Nxe5!µ Even if he may be an exchange up for a few moves, White's position is just ruined here; 15.Bb3? Nc6 16.Qe4 Nxe5!µ.] 15...Qc7



Position after: 15...Qc7

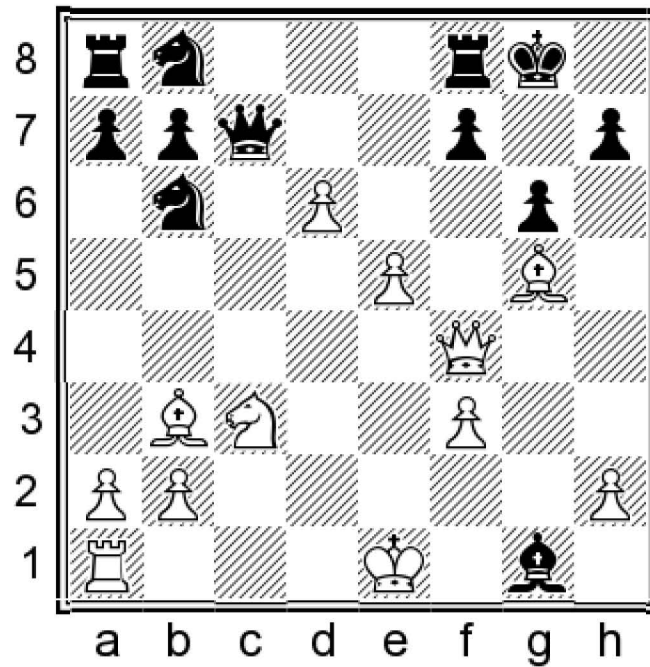
B1) 16.Be2 has never been tried to my knowledge, and could catch some victims! 16...Bc5 17.Qh4 [17.Qd2!?] 17...f6 ∞ This is in my opinion the position that should be investigated, since 17...Qxe5 18.Bf6 seems nice for White and Black ends up lost from 17...Bxg1? 18.Bf6 Be3 19.f4 h5 20.Qg5 Kh7 21.Bd3 Bxf4 22.Qxh5+ Bh6.



Position after: 22...Bh6

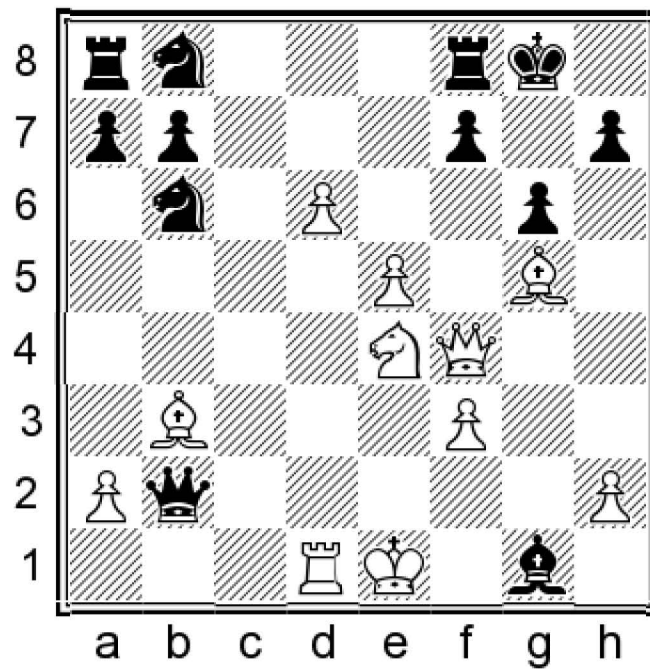
Now comes the pretty finish. 23.Ne4!! White threatens the unstoppable 24.Ng5. 23...gxh5 24.Ng5+ Kg8 25.Bh7#.

B2) 16.Bb3 Bc5 17.Qf4 Bxg1 18.d6



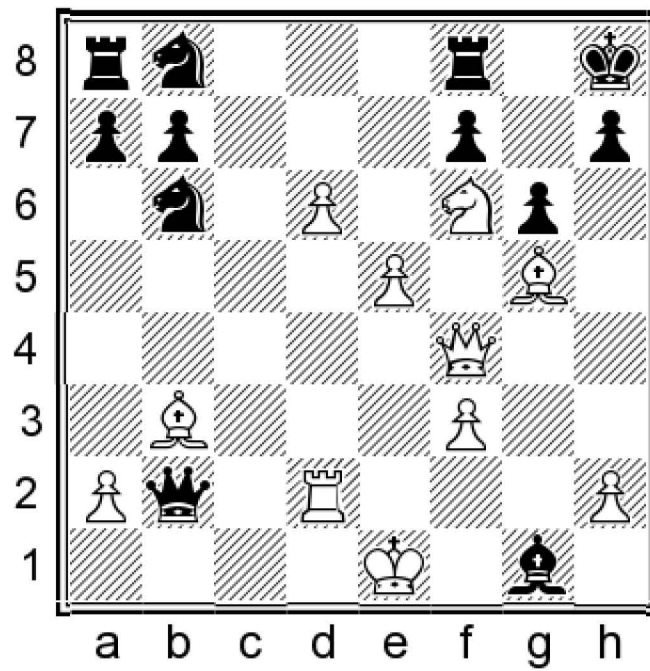
Position after: 18.d6

18...Qc5! [18...Qc8? remained unpunished in Bronstein, D (2585) – Ljubojevic, L (2570) Petropolis 1973, where White replied 19.Ke2?! instead of the better 19.0-0-0!±.] 19.Ne4 Qd4 [19...Qb4+? 20.Kf1 Bd4 21.Nf6+ Kh8 22.Re1+–] 20.Rd1 [On 20.e6 there is 20...N8d7!.] 20...Qxb2



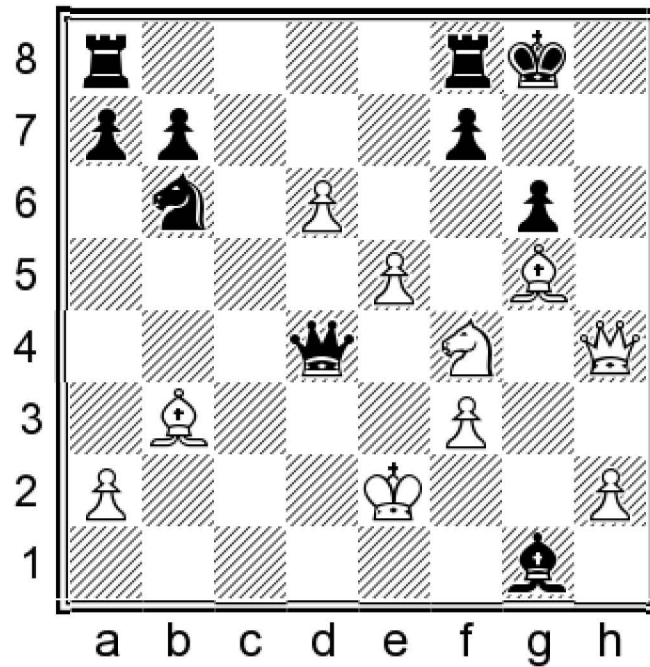
Position after: 20...Qxb2

21.Nf6+ The main move. [White has to make a choice. The immediate 21.Rd2 is playable, while 21.e6 occurred in Gruenfeld, Y – Ljubojevic, L Riga 1979, which continued 21...N8d7 22.e7 Qxh2 23.exf8=Q+ Rxf8 24.Qxh2 Bxh2∞. Thanks to his strong passer on d6 White has some compensation for his two-pawns deficit, but it's hard to believe it's really enough.] 21...Kh8 22.Rd2.



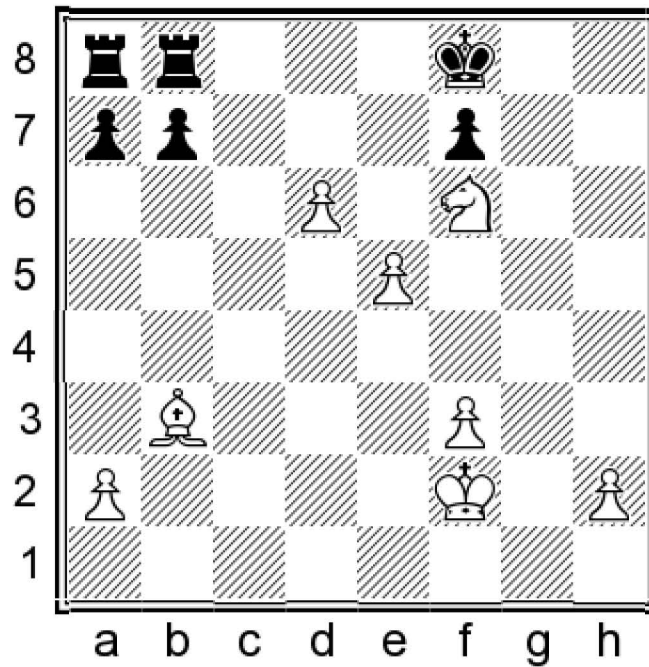
Position after: 22.Rd2

22...Qa1+ [Or 22...Qc1+ 23.Ke2 Qc5 with equality according to the computer!] 23.Ke2 Nc6 24.Qh4 h5 25.Nxh5 Nd4+ 26.Rxd4 Qxd4 27.Nf4+ Kg8



Position after: 27...Kg8

Another critical moment has arisen. 28.Bf6! [After 28.Qh6? it is White who gets mated by force: 28...Qe3+ 29.Kd1 Qxf3+ 30.Ne2 Nd5 31.Bf6 Nc3+ 32.Kc2 Qxe2+ 33.Kxc3 Rfc8+ 34.Kb4 Bc5+ 0-1 San Marco, B (2330) – Gantet, G Paris 1989.] 28...Qf2+ 29.Qxf2 Bxf2 30.Nxg6 Rfb8 31.Kxf2 Nd7 32.Ne7+ Kf8 33.Nd5 Nxf6 34.Nxf6∞

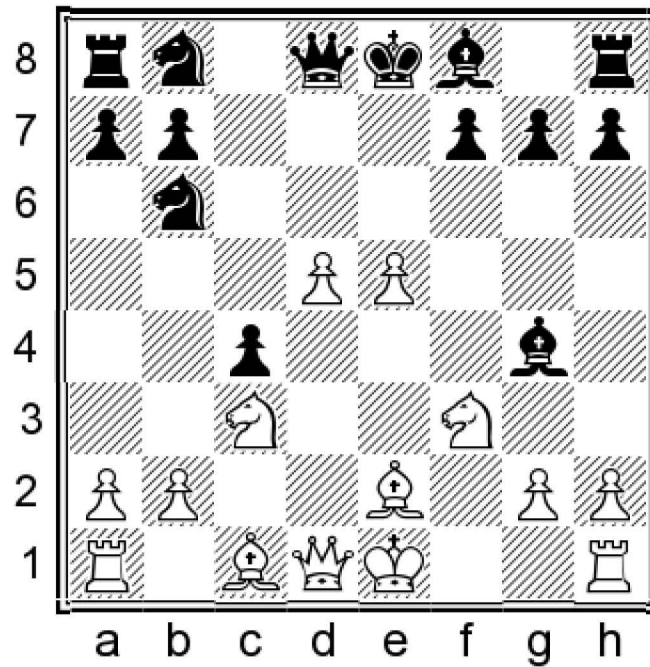


Position after: 34.Nxf6

This has been tried once in Planchat, C – Dziedzina, M IECG email 1998, which ended in a draw. In this atypical endgame Black has a material advantage, but his rooks are for the time being ridiculous and the white pawns are quite strong (imagine that White achieves f4-f5 and e5-e6...).

All those lines deriving from 11.Qd4?! are beautiful and provide an excellent analytical exercise, though they have become rather irrelevant since 11.Be2! is stronger, and before that 10.d6!. It is also my way of paying tribute to the work done by authors in the pre-computer era (imagine checking everything without simply clicking to ask for the engine's opinion!), whose work, apart from a few mistakes, was essentially fairly correct.

Let's return to 11.Be2!.

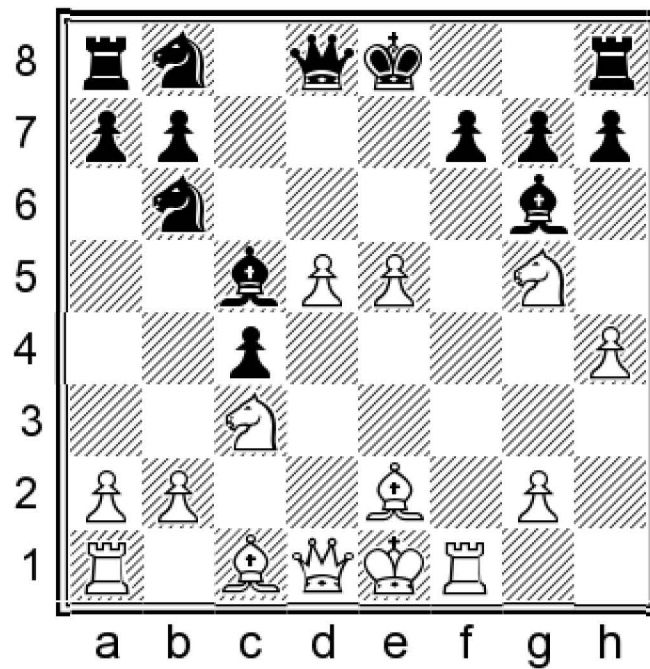


Position after: 11.Be2!

11...Bc5

11...Bb4 12.0-0 Bxc3 13.bxc3 Qxd5 14.Qxd5 Nxd5 15.Bxc4 Boudre, J (2320) – Werner, D (2380) Royan 1988. Black lasted only eight more moves, which gives an indication of the practical and objective problems he faces here. If 15...Be6 then 16.Ng5,.

12.Ng5 Bf5 13.Rf1 Bg6 14.h4±

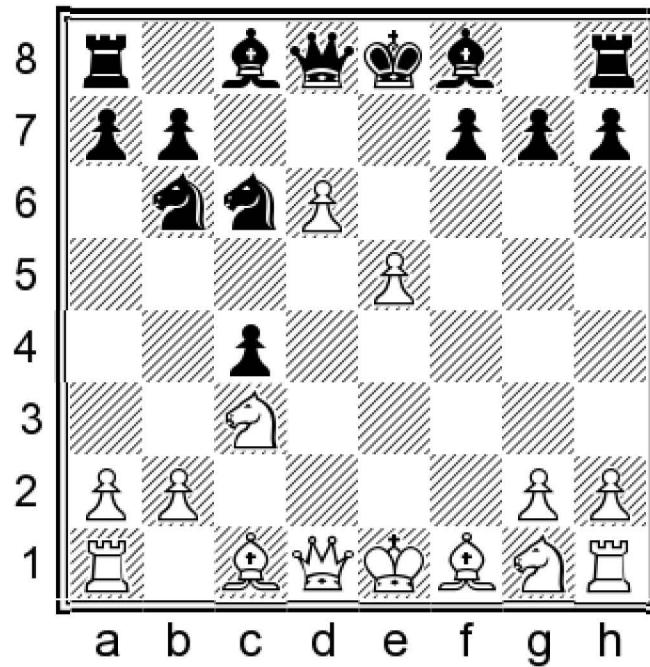


Position after: 14.h4±

Buecker, S (2400) – Fleck, J (2400) Bunde 1985. That game continued 14...h6 15.h5!, but 14...h5 was no solution either since Black can't castle anymore. Thus simply 15.Bf4 or 15.a3 first.

b) 4.c4 Nb6 5.f4 dxe5 6.fxe5 c5 7.d5 e6 with 10.d6 Nc6 11.Nf3, 11.Nb5

1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.c4 Nb6 5.f4 dxe5 6.fxe5 c5 7.d5 e6? 8.Nc3 exd5 9.cxd5 c4! 10.d6! Nc6

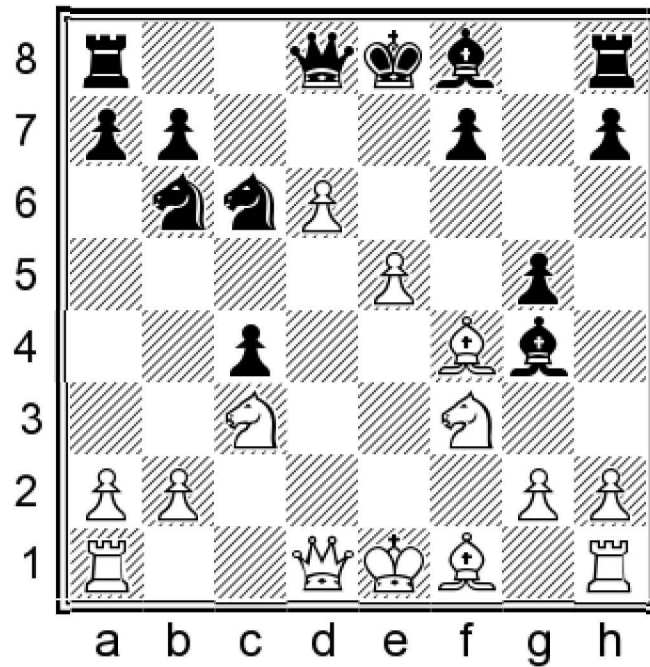


Position after: 10...Nc6

11.Nb5

A) 11.Bf4! is the refutation of the whole line, see the next subchapter.

B) 11.Nf3!? is also quite delicate to handle from the black perspective, and possibly even stronger than 11.Nb5. The major attempt at making this sub-line playable for Black involves a queen sacrifice. 11...Bg4 12.Bf4 g5!?

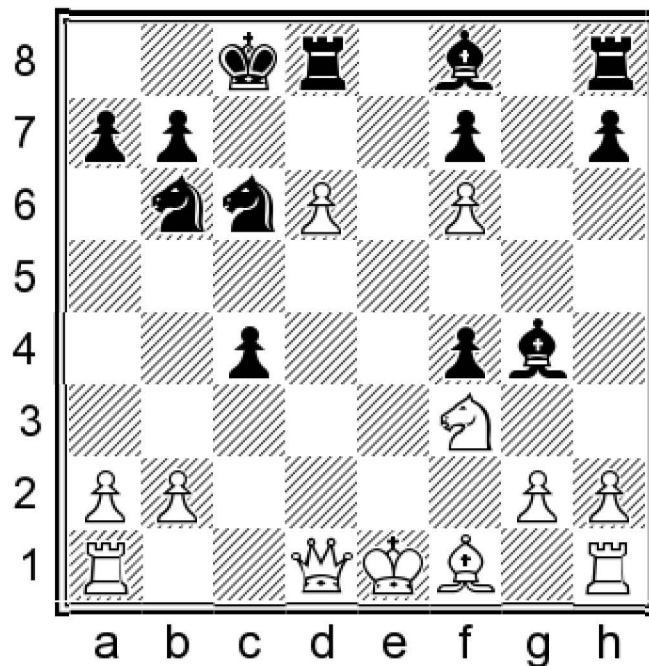


Position after: 12...g5!?

Black severely weakens his kingside in order to win a crucial tempo. [On 12...g6 both 13.Nb5 and 13.Nd5 look a bit problematic.]

B1) 13.Bg3!? Bg7 14.Be2 and after either 14...Bxf3 15.Bxf3 Nxe5 16.0-0 or 14...0-0 15.0-0 Nd7 Black will win the e5-pawn. Were his pawn on g6 rather than g5 he would be doing well, but in the actual situation the fragile black kingside outweighs the material factor.

B2) 13.Ne4 gxf4 14.Nf6+ Qxf6 15.exf6 0-0-0©

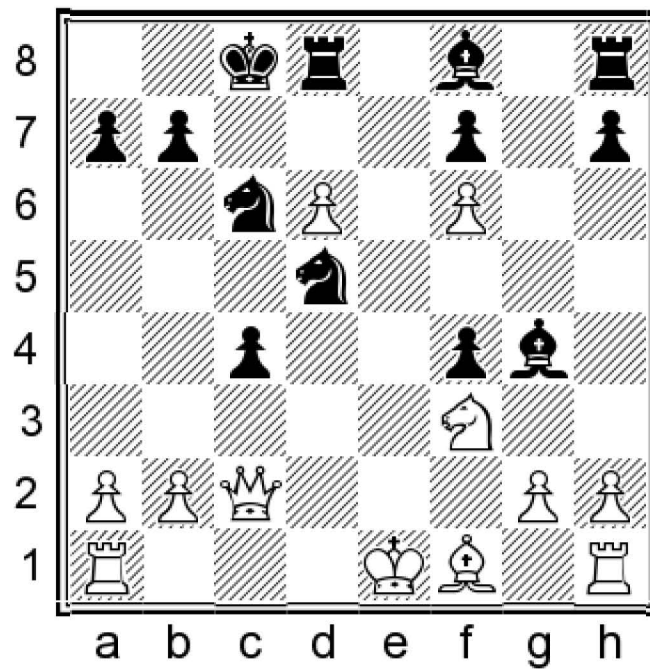


Position after: 15...0-0-0©

B2.1) 16.Qc1 Re8+ 17.Kf2 Bxd6 18.Bxc4 Bc5+ 19.Kf1 Be3 20.Qc3 Nxc4 21.Qxc4 Rd8 This happened in Bryson, D (2388) – Luther, T (2538) Bled Olympiad 2002. That game ended peacefully after only seven more moves after White had to give up all his hopes of scoring a full point.

B2.2) 16.Qd2? was Paveto, K (2397) – Wainer, D (2117) Buenos Aires 2015, where instead of 16...Bxd6?! 17.0-0-0?, Black should have gone for 16...Rxd6! 17.Qxf4 Re6+ 18.Be2 h5, with (at least!) adequate compensation for the invested material.

B2.3) 16.Qc2!? Nd5!

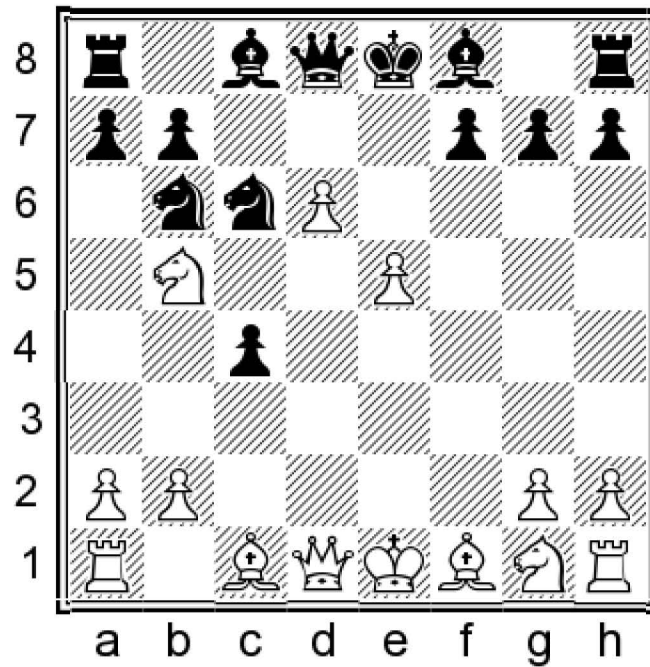


Position after: 16...Nd5!

17.Bxc4 [or 17.0-0-0 Ne3 18.Qa4 Nxd1 19.Qxd1 Bxd6 20.Bxc4 Kb8©]
 17...Ne3 18.Qa4 Bxf3 19.gxf3 Bxd6© or 19...Rxd6.

In all those lines where Black plays with two minor pieces against the queen he has firm control of the dark squares and a dominant knight on e3, while White is worried with his king stuck in the center.

Back to 11.Nb5.

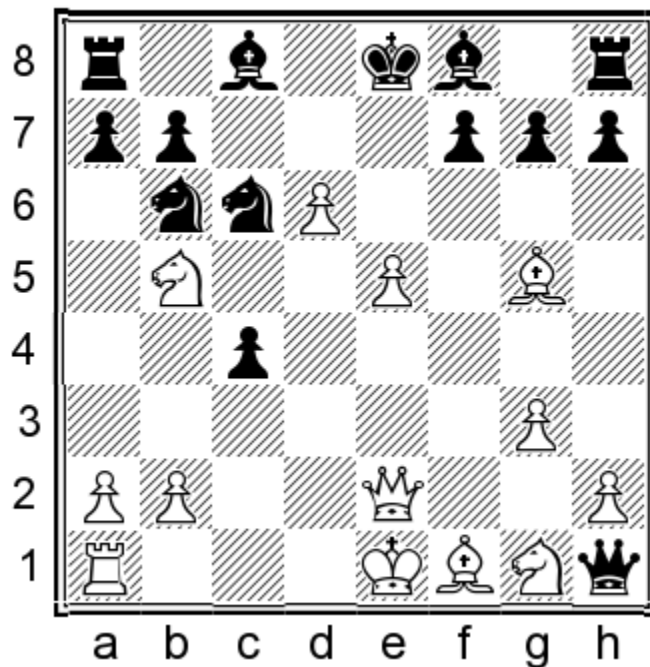


Position after: 11.Nb5

11...Nxe5!

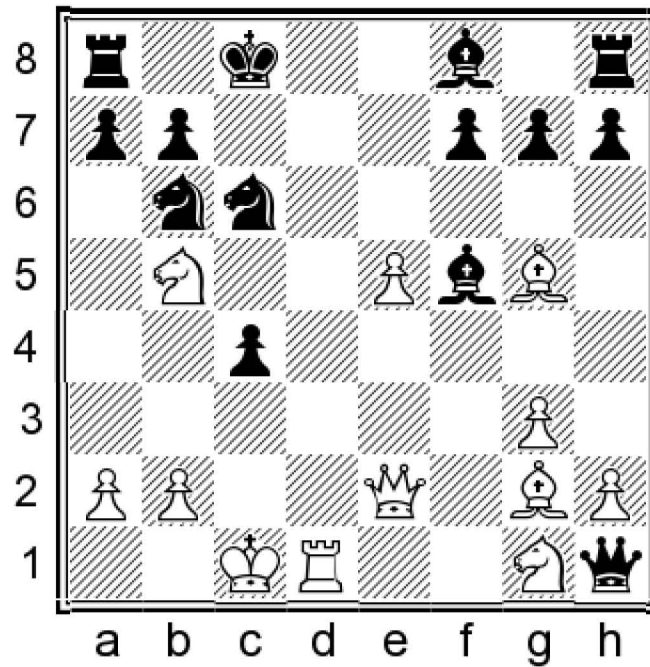
This move has never been tested so far, although it had been suggested by Bronstein back in 1973!! Some of the following lines have been mentioned by Valentin Bogdanov in *Play the Alekhine*, published in 2009. I dug more deeply, coming to the statement that you can find in twelve more moves.

11...Qh4+ 12.g3 Qe4+ 13.Qe2 Qxh1 14.Bg5!!+-



Position after: 14.Bg5!!+- A whole rook up, Black is losing. His queen out of play in the corner, but the biggest issue is his king, too vulnerable to survive. A little bit of accuracy is required from White but basically it's curtains!

A) 14...Bf5 15.d7+ [15.0-0-0! was even stronger.] 15...Kxd7 16.0-0-0+ Kc8 17.Bg2

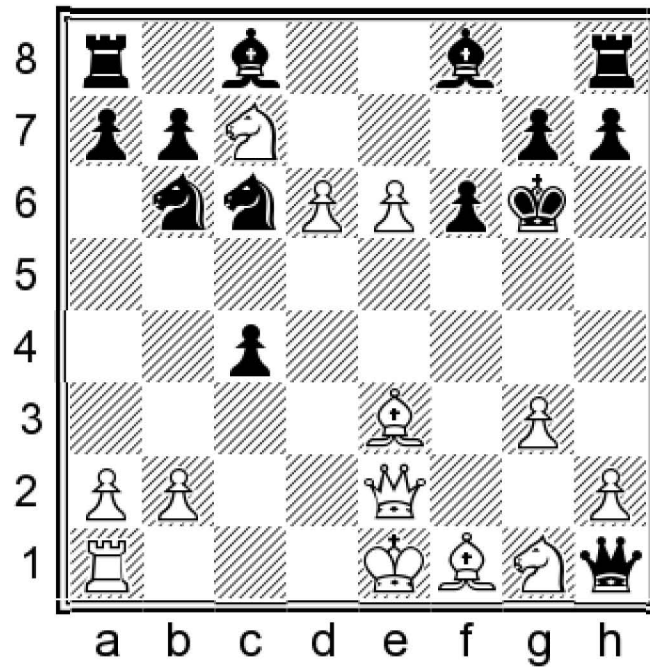


Position after: 17.Bg2

I was present at the time when the game Simon, O – Dunis, A, Marseille 2001 took place. Instead of the game continuation, 17...Be7, best would have been now 17...Qxg2 since 17...Qxh2 allows White to finish in style: 18.Bxc6 Qxe2 19.Rd8#.

B) 14...Be6 15.0-0-0! with the cute threat of 16.d6-d7+ and 17.Nc7 mate! 15...Kd7 16.Bg2 Qxh2 17.Bxc6+ bxc6 18.Qxh2 cxb5 19.Ne2+– Fluvia Poyatos, J (2318) – Moreno Mestre, J (2015) Oropesa del Mar 1999.

C) 14...f6 15.Nc7+ Kf7 16.e6+ Kg6 17.Be3!



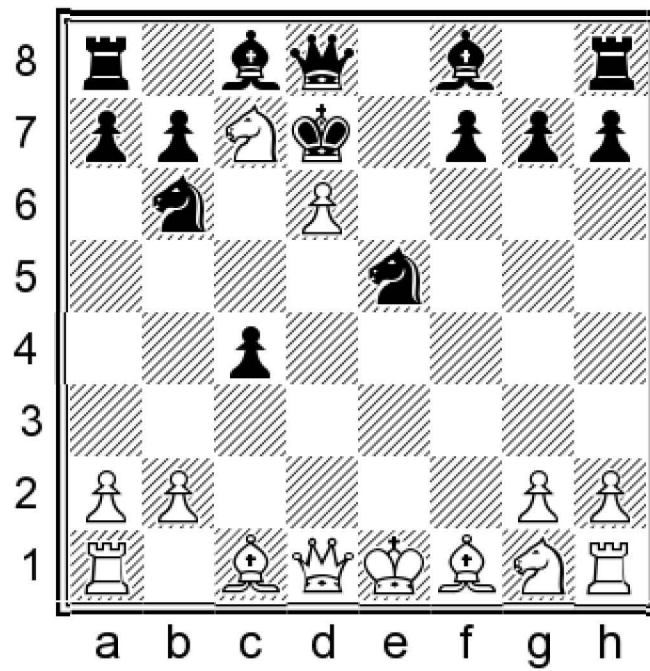
Position after: 17.Be3!

A very picturesque position! The threat is double: 18.Qg4 mate and 18.Bg2, which would win the queen. 17...f5 18.0-0-0 White is totally winning.

12.Nc7+

12.Bf4 also needs to be checked more thoroughly. I'd suggest you start with 12...Qf6 13.Qd2 Nd5! 14.Bg5 Qf5 15.0-0-0 Be6∞.

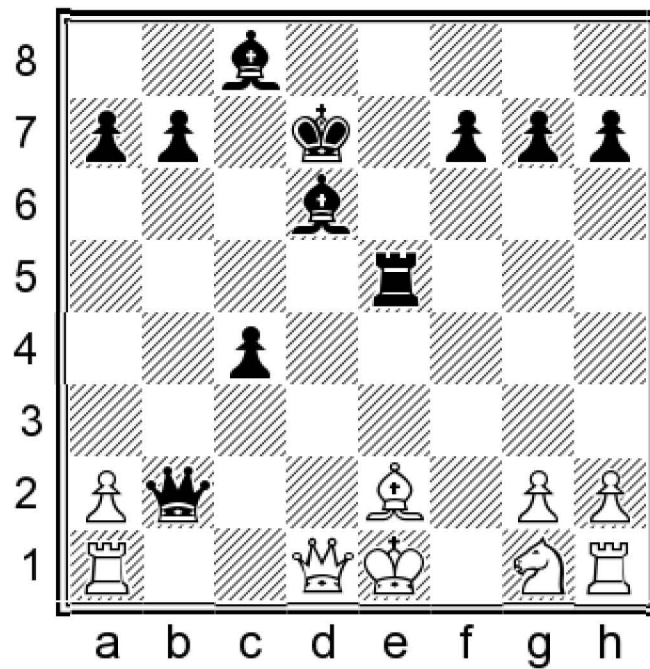
12...Kd7



Position after: 12...Kd7

13.Nf3

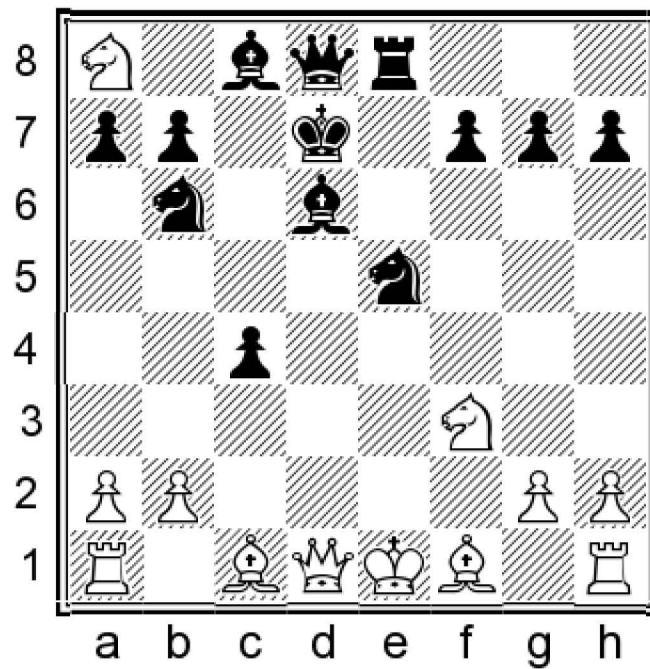
13.Bf4 Bxd6 [13...Qf6!?] 14.Nxa8 Re8 15.Nxb6+ Qxb6 16.Bxe5 Rxe5+
17.Be2 Qxb2©



Position after: 17...Qxb2©

All this after 13...Bxd6 was pretty much forced, according to the machine. Black has only three pawn for the rook here, but White can't easily complete his development as 18.Nf3 would run into 18...Rxe2+. Black will play ...b7-b5 soon, to safeguard the c4-pawn, the next step being then to introduce the light-squared bishop into the game.

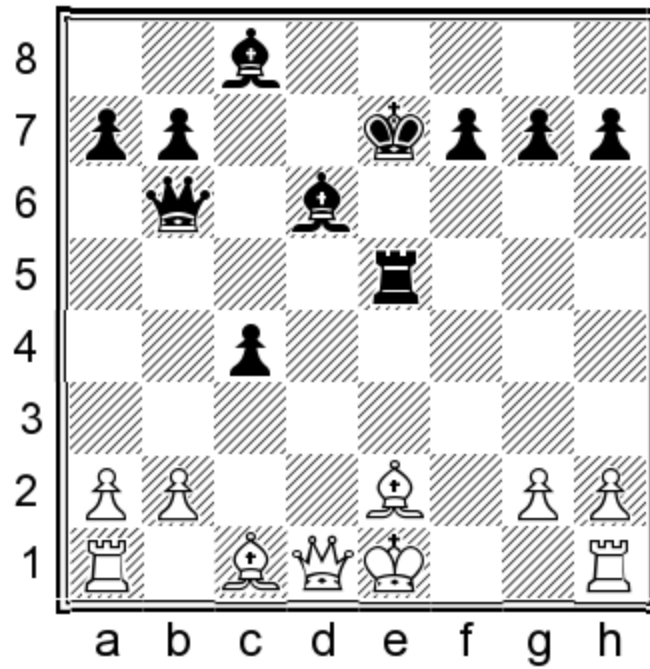
13...Bxd6 14.Nxa8 Re8



Position after: 14...Re8

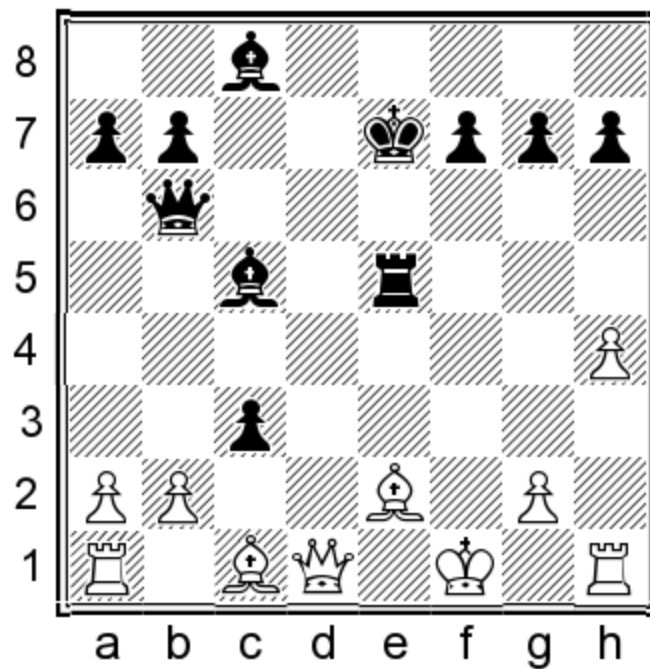
15.Nxe5+

Or 15.Nxb6+ Qxb6 16.Nxe5+ [16.Qa4+ Kd8 17.Bg5+ f6 18.Bxf6+ gxf6 19.0-0-0 Nxf3 20.gxf3 Bf5∞] 16...Rxe5+ 17.Be2 Ke7.



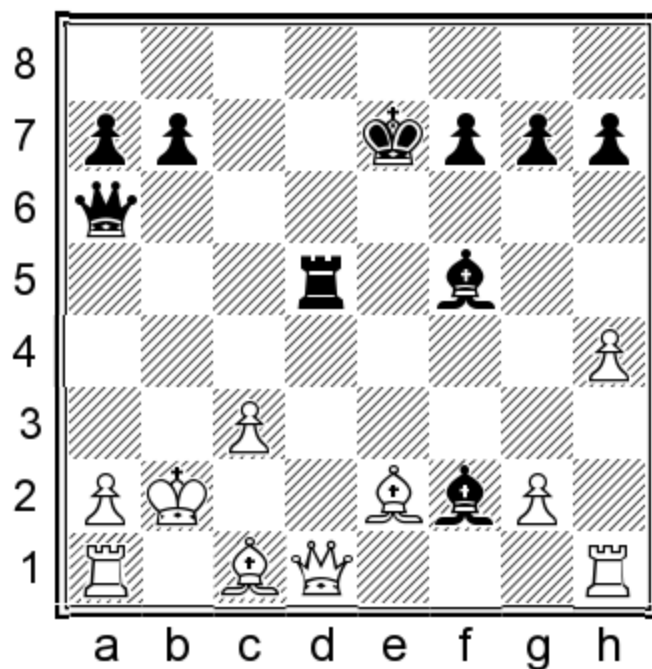
Position after: 17...Ke7

Our cybernetic friend affirms that this actual position is equal and should end peacefully. Some sample lines follow. 18.Kf1 Bc5 [18...c3!?] 19.h4 c3!!



Position after: 19...c3!!

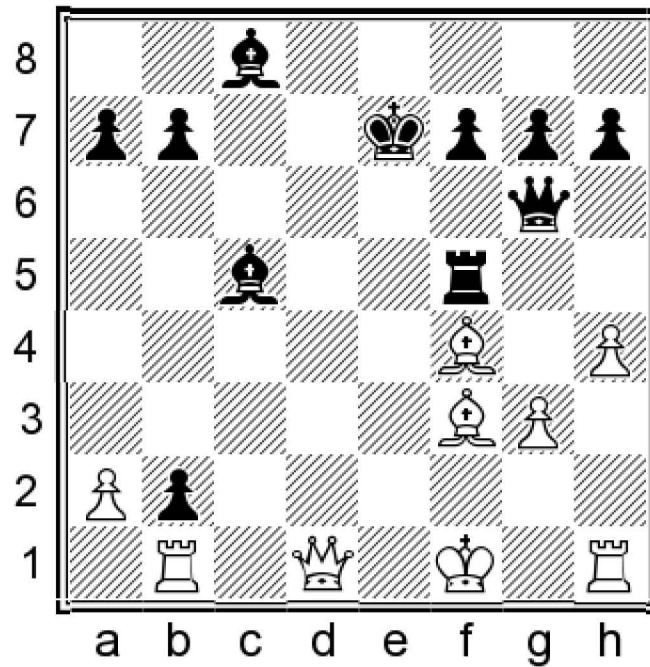
A) The devilish point of Black's last move is revealed after 20.bxc3??
 Qf6+ 21.Bf3 Qa6+ 22.Be2 Rf5+ 23.Ke1 Bf2+ 24.Kd2 Rd5+ 25.Kc2 Bf5+
 26.Kb2



Position after: 26.Kb2

26...Rb5+ 27.Bxb5 Qxb5+ 28.Qb3 Qe2+ 29.Ka3 Bc5+--+. .

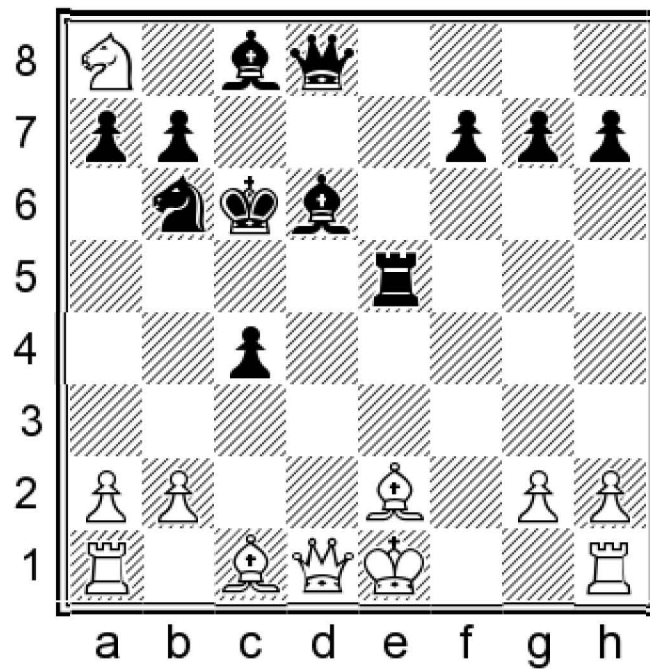
B) 20.Bf4 After this the long sequence that follows is a forced draw by repetition! 20...Rf5 21.g3 cxb2 22.Rb1 Qg6 23.Bf3



Position after: 23.Bf3

23...Rxf4!! 24.Qe1+! [The intermediate check is a must, since the immediate capture 24.gxf4? runs into 24...Bh3+!! 25.Ke2 Qe6+ 26.Kd3 Bf5+ 27.Kc3 Qe3+ 28.Kc4 b5+ 29.Kxb5 Bd3+ 30.Qxd3 Qxd3+ 31.Kxc5 Qxf3μ.] 24...Kf8 25.gxf4 Bh3+ 26.Rxh3 Qg1+ 27.Ke2 Qe3+ 28.Kf1 Qg1² Black achieves a draw two rooks down – you don't see this every day!

15...Rxe5+ 16.Be2 Kc6!

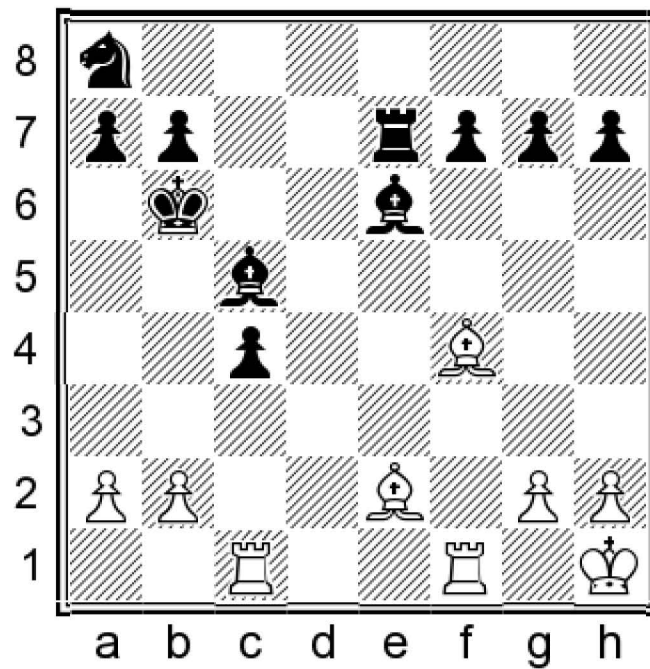


Position after: 16...Kc6!

17.0-0

17.Nxb6 Qh4+ 18.g3 Qe4 19.Bf4 Qxh1+ [19...Bb4+ 20.Kf2 Bc5+ 21.Ke1=] 20.Kd2 Rxe2+ 21.Qxe2 Bxf4+ 22.gxf4 Qxa1 23.Nxc4=

17...Bc5+ 18.Kh1 Qxd1 19.Bxd1 Nxa8 20.Bf4 Re7 21.Bf3+ Kb6 22.Rac1 Be6 23.Be2±/²

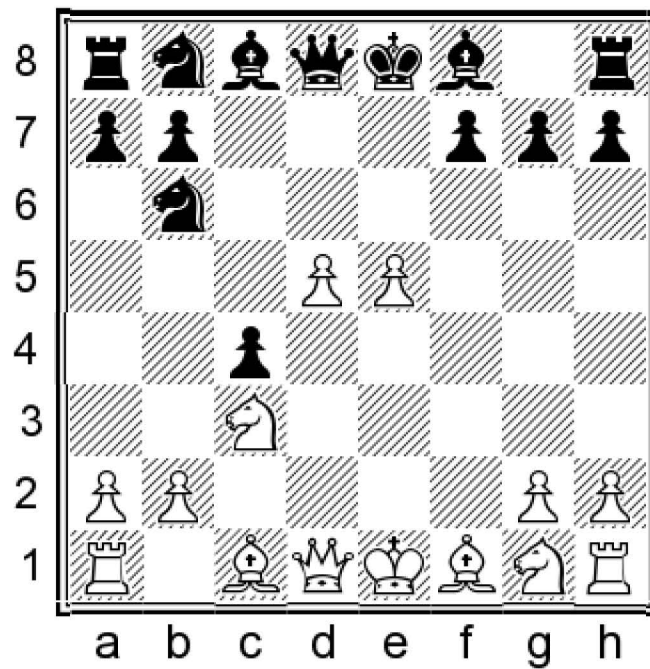


Position after: 23.Be2±

And now the sad thing about 11...Nxe5: if White finds all those moves from move 12 he stands between slightly and much better in the current endgame anyway, and I can't guarantee that perfect play would hold for sure...

c) 4.c4 Nb6 5.f4 dxe5 6.fxe5 c5 7.d5 e6 with 10.d6 Nc6 11.Bf4

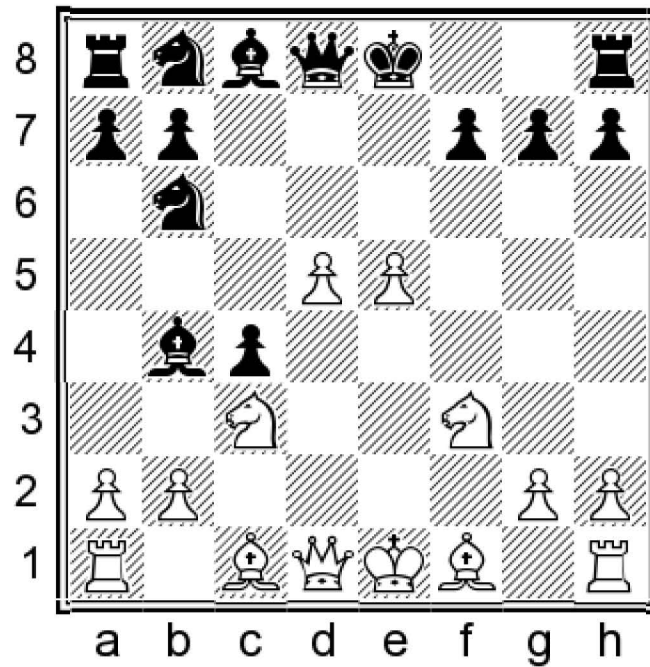
1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.c4 Nb6 5.f4 dxe5 6.fxe5 c5 7.d5 e6? 8.Nc3 exd5 9.cxd5 c4!



Position after: 9...c4!

10.d6!

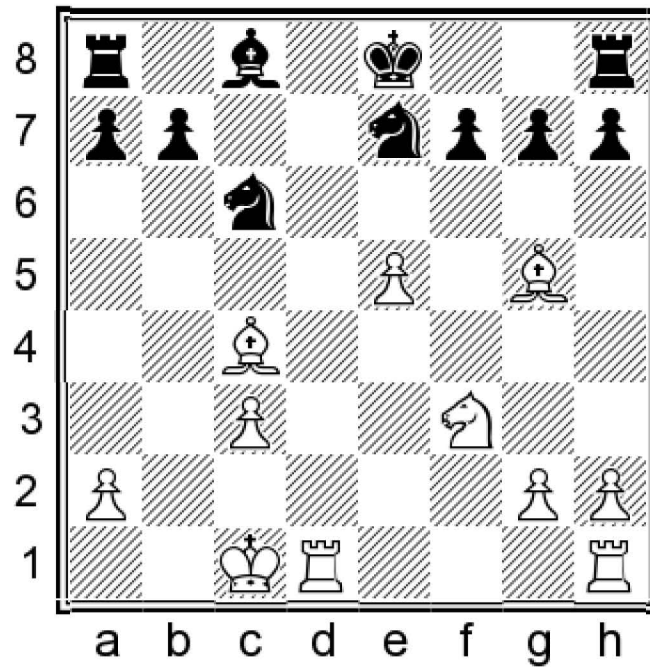
Note that while 10.Bxc4?? loses to 10...Qh4+, 10.Nf3 has long been the main line for White. Nowadays theory has shown the way for Black to equalize (10...Bb4!) and it is no longer considered critical. I include this line here, before we turn our attention to 10.d6! which is the refutation of 7...e6. If you are interested in White's broad and fascinating bunch of alternatives, on move 10 and after 10.Nf3 Bg4?!, please see subchapter 'a'. 10.Nf3 Bb4! Developing the dark-squared bishop is consistent with Black's last move.



Position after: 10...Bb4!

A) 11.d6 leads to a complex middlegame after 11...Nc6 or 11...Bg4 12.Be2 0-0 13.0-0 Nc6 ∞ , while both 11.Bg5 and the main option 11.Bxc4 invite simplifications.

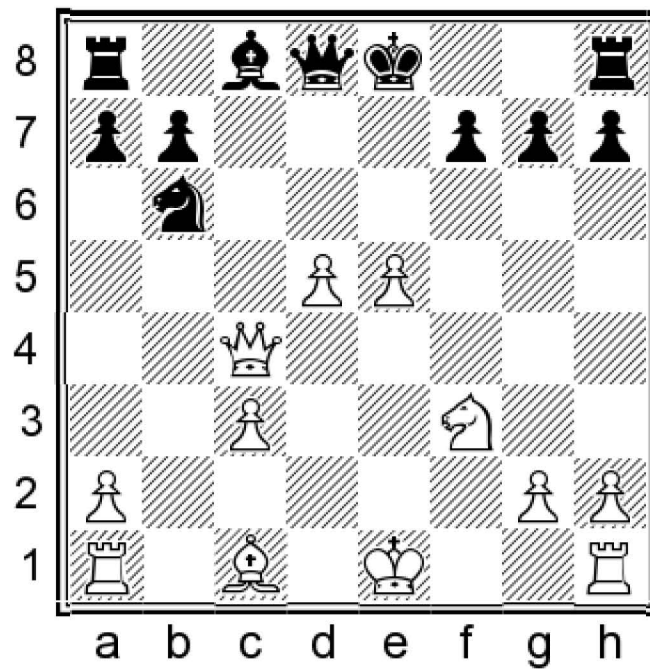
B) 11.Bg5 Qxd5 12.Qxd5 Bxc3+! 13.bxc3 Nxd5 14.0-0-0 Ne7 15.Bxc4 Nbc6 ∞ .



Position after: 15...Nbc6

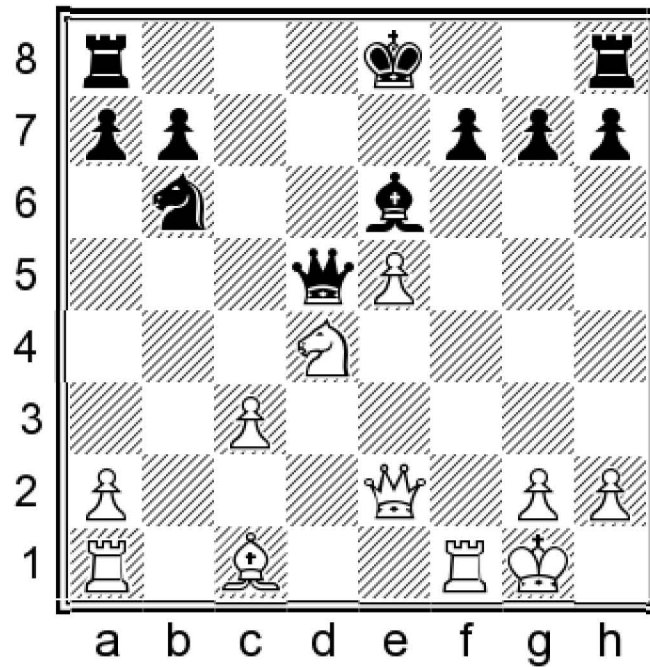
White's pawn structure is spoiled but he is ahead in development and has the two bishops. Since Black has no weakness, the position should be balanced.

C) 11.Bxc4 Bxc3+ 12.bxc3 Nxc4 13.Qa4+ Nd7 14.Qxc4 Nb6



Position after: 14...Nb6

The last sequence of moves was virtually forced and Black will regain his pawn, remaining – as in the 11.Bg5 line – with the healthier structure against the activity of his opponent. 15.Qb5+ Qd7 16.Qe2 [The alternative 16.Qxd7+ Bxd7 17.d6 Rc8 Shirov, A – Shabalov, A (2365) Riga 1986 gave Black sufficient compensation and the players agreed a draw only nine moves later.] 16...Qxd5 17.0-0 Bf5 [17...Bd7!?] 18.Nd4 Be6

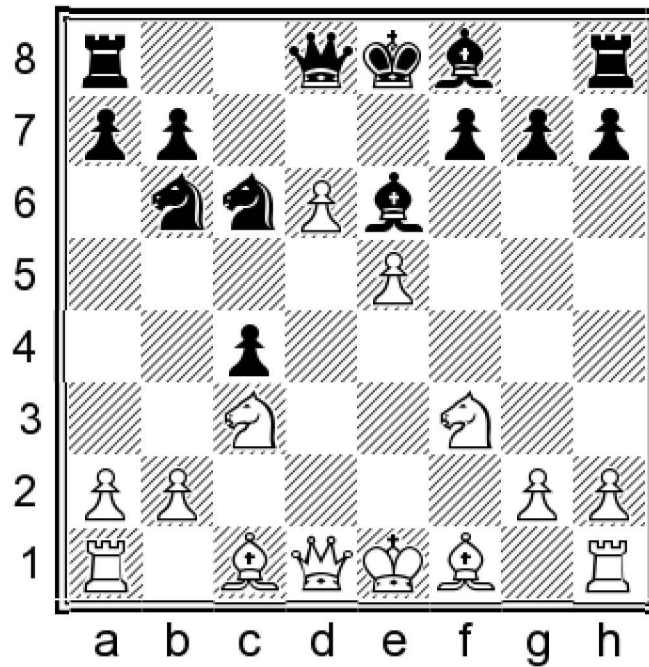


Position after: 18...Be6

Jenal, J (2452) – Carleton, J (2442) ICCF corr 1999. The position is approximately equal. After 19.Ba3 Nc4 20.Bd6 Black can apparently afford 20...Nxd6 21.exd6 0-0-0=.

10...Nc6

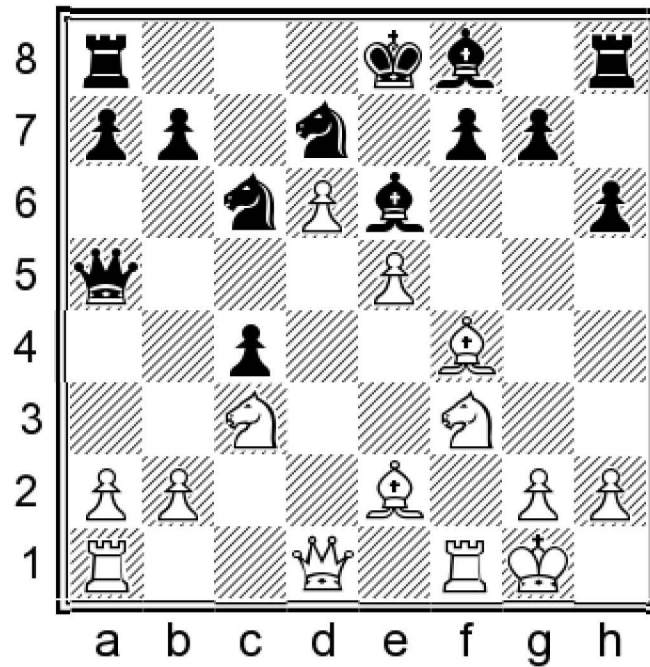
Black has also experimented with 10...Be6 11.Nf3 Nc6.



Position after: 11...Nc6

A) 12.Be2 Nd7 13.Bf4 Logical moves from both sides, with White simply developing while protecting his e5-pawn. Black has serious problems with his dark-squared bishop and German GM Thomas Luther, who championed this line almost 20 years ago, failed to equalize in practice (to put it mildly).

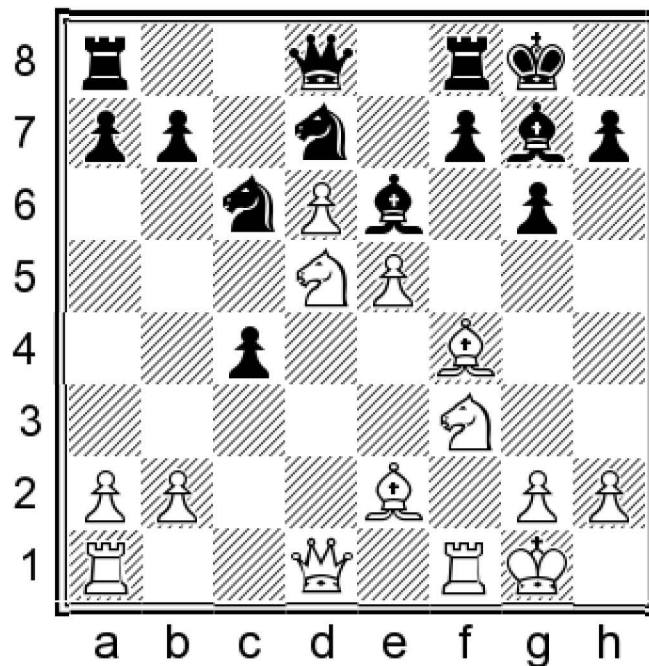
A1) 13...Qa5 14.0-0 h6 [14...Ndxe5 15.Kh1©]



Position after: 14...h6

15.Nd4! Stronger than 15.Bg3, as played in Korneev, O (2613) – Luther, T (2575) Catalan Bay 2003, when 15...0-0-0 may still be acceptable for Black. 15...Qc5 16.Ncb5 0-0-0 and now comes the nasty 17.b4! Nxb4 18.Rb1,. All in all there seems to be quite a few “holes” in the variation 10...Be6.

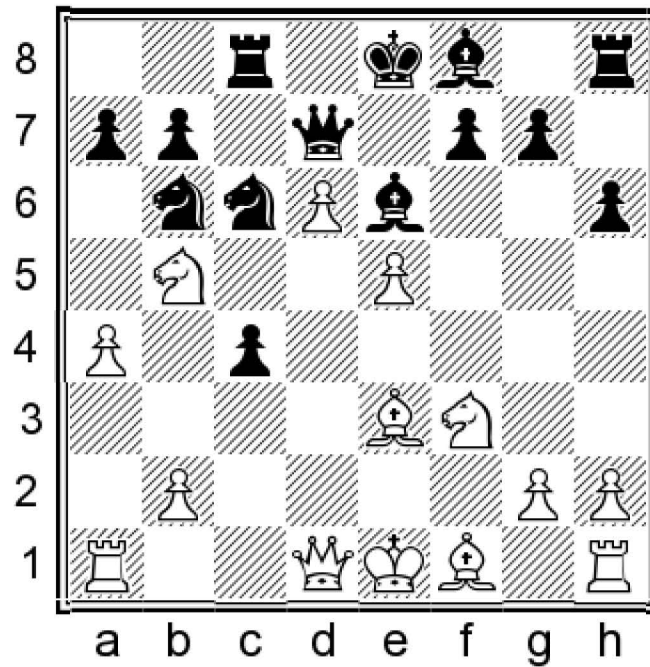
A2) Or 13...g6 when after 14.0-0 Bg7 15.Nd5 0-0



Position after: 15...0-0

two moves are in White's favor, and considerably so. 16.Bxc4 [16.Nc7 Ndx5 17.Nxe5 Nxe5 18.Nxa8 Qxa8 19.Qd2² Zelcic, R (2543) – Luther, T (2574) Dresden 2003.] 16...Bg4 [16...Ndx5 17.Nxe5 Nxe5 18.Bb3²] 17.Qe1 Bxf3 18.Rxf3 Ndx5 19.Ne7+!²

B) Besides 12.Be2 and 12.Bf4!, which transposes into 10.Bf4!, there is also 12.Bg5, when 12...f6 seems right. White can also jump 12.Nb5 with the obvious idea of a fork on c7. Note, however, that if he does that too hastily Black will be more than happy to sacrifice the exchange. Indeed, the second player would get a pawn and free his dark-squared bishop in return, with the queen immediately hitting the e5-pawn from c7. 12...Rc8 13.Bg5 Qd7 14.a4 h6 15.Be3

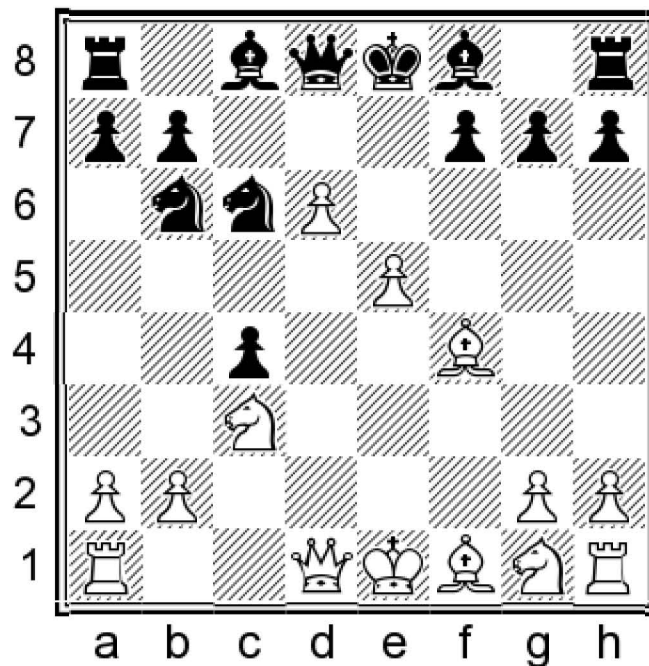


Position after: 15.Be3

15...Nd5?! This was played in Movsesian, S (2659) – Luther, T (2571) Istanbul 2003, where White missed 16.Bxa7, with a clear plus. Instead 15...g5! would still have been very much playable for Black following 16.Nxa7 Nxa7 17.Bxb6 Nc6 18.Be2 Bg7². Black will take revenge on the e5-pawn, restoring the material parity.

11.Bf4!

For 11.Nf3!? and 11.Nb5!? see the previous subchapters.

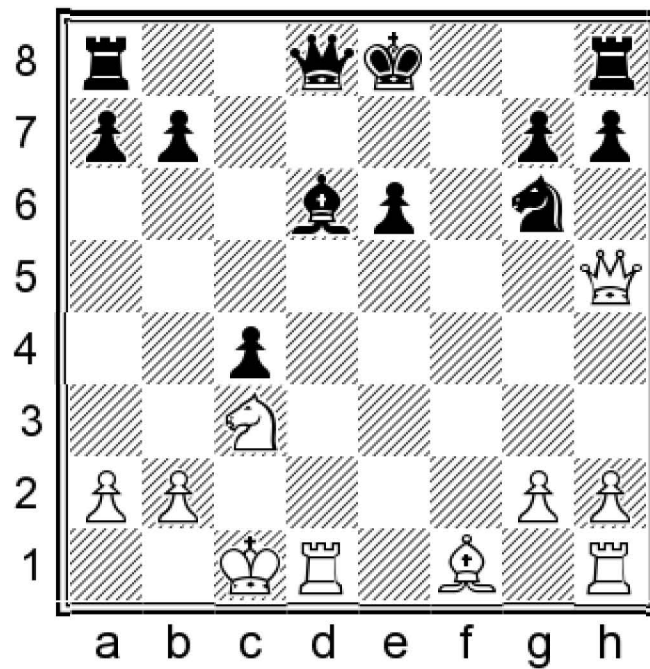


Position after: 11.Bf4!

11...g5

Trying to win a tempo by hitting the enemy bishop and following up with ...Bf8-g7.

The alternative 11...Be6 isn't any rosier for Black. 12.Nf3 Nd7 13.Nd4?! This occurred in Barreras Garcia, A (2407) – Carvalho, L (2168) ICCF email 2005 [Though the idea is right, its execution should have been 13.Ng5!, when now 13...Ndxe5 will transpose into the game quoted above. On 13...Qb6 White would secure a marked edge following 14.Nxe6 fxe6 15.Qg4 0-0-0 16.0-0-0, or 15...Qxb2?! 16.Qxe6+ Be7 17.Rc1 Rf8 18.Be3+-]. 13...Ndxe5? [13...Nxd4! 14.Qxd4 g5 15.Bg3 Rc8 Perhaps this line remains playable for Black, who intends ...Bg7, ...Qa5 and ...Rc5 to grab the e5-pawn.] 14.Nxe6 fxe6 15.Bxe5 Nxe5 16.Qh5+ Ng6 17.0-0-0 Bxd6



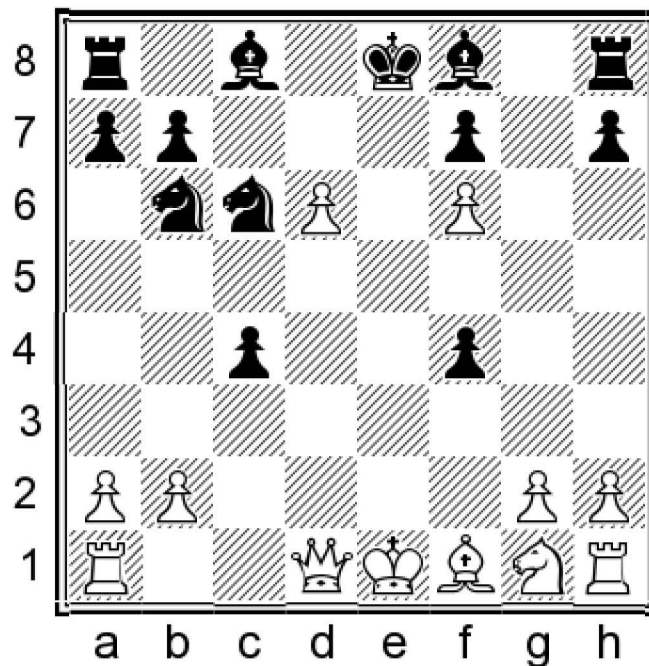
Position after: 17...Bxd6

18.Bxc4? Letting Black breathe since he now gets the vital tempo to hide his king [with 18.Qb5+! White would have prevented kingside castling and kept a big plus]. 18...0-0 19.Bxe6+ Kh8 20.Bf5 Bf4+ 21.Kb1 Qg5 Black was out of danger in the above-mentioned game.

12.Ne4! gxf4

Black has no proper way to prevent 13.Nf6+ and cover his g5-pawn simultaneously. He therefore has to embark upon the coming queen sacrifice.

13.Nf6+ Qxf6 14.exf6



Position after: 14.exf6

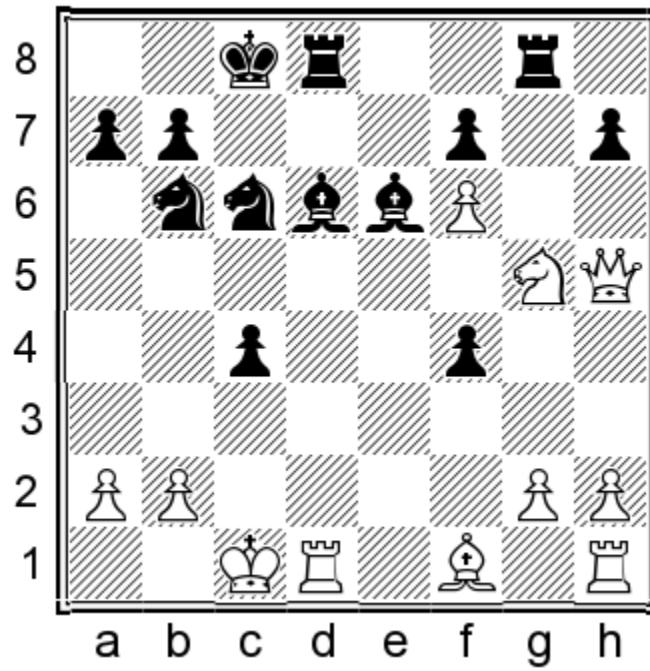
If you compare this with the analogous position from the previous sub-chapter, you'll notice that White's knight is still on g1 and Black's bishop on c8. This makes a huge difference.

14...Be6 15.Qh5!

White has activated his queen, whereas in the 11.Nf3 Bg4 12.Bf4 g5 variation it has to sit passively in its own camp. Alone the queen doesn't do much harm, but it controls several important squares, eyes the f7- and h7-pawns and thus considerably restricts the opponent's activity. Black lacks adequate compensation here and the extra material should eventually prevail.

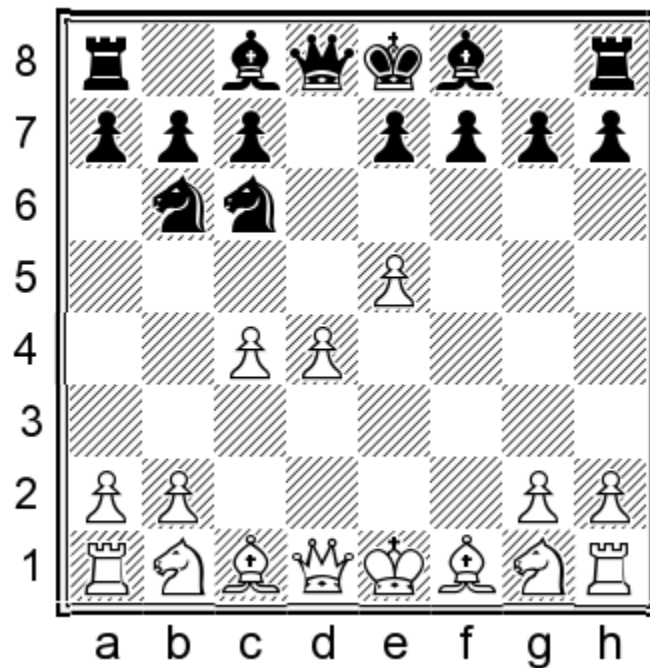
15...Bxd6 16.0-0-0 0-0-0 17.Nf3 Rhg8 18.Ng5!±

White soberly converted his advantage in Zude, A (2295) – Buecker, S (2300) Bad Neuenahr 1987.



Position after: 18.Ng5!

d) 4.c4 Nb6 5.f4 dxe5 6.fxe5 Nc6 (Summary) 1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.c4 Nb6 5.f4 dxe5 6.fxe5 Nc6



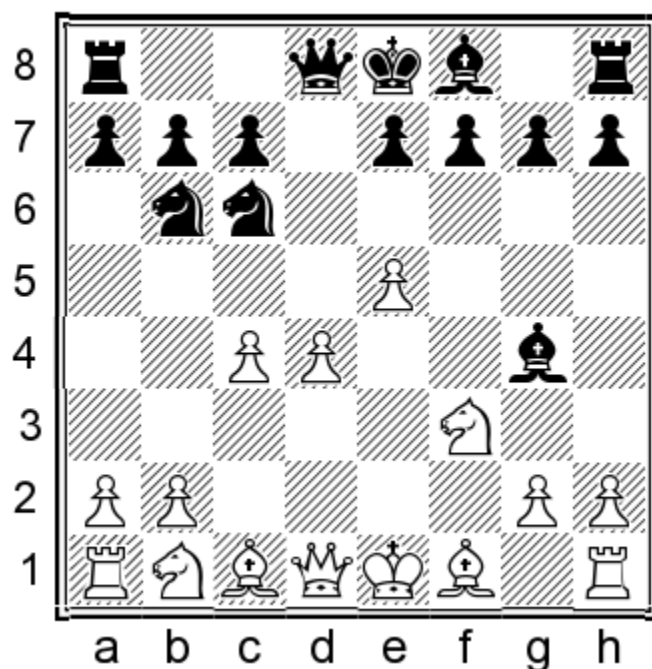
Position after: 6...Nc6

This introduces the Classical Line (I don't know if it carries a proper name) of the Four Pawns Attack, which is by far Black's most popular choice. This implies that theory has identified the variations where Black could experience problems but then solve them. The sequence 5...dxe5 6.fxe5 Nc6 7.Be3 Bf5 can thus be considered Black's most reliable path, although some of the positions arising from the Classical Lines are quite sharp. It requires, on the other hand, much more knowledge than the lines I suggest.

What follows is a summary of GM Alexei Kornev's coverage in *Play the Alekhine Defence*, a fairly good and exhaustive work in my opinion, aimed at showing you some directions in case you want to study the Classical Line. Since I already recommend two lines and mention the refutation of a third one, I have not annotated this particular section.

7.Be3

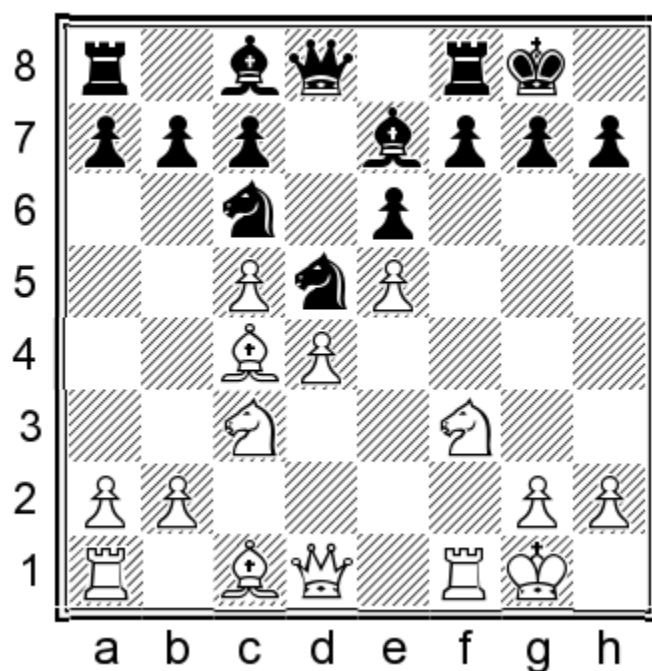
A) 7.Nf3?! Bg4



Position after: 7...Bg4

8.e6?! [8.Be2 e6 9.Nc3 Bxf3 10.Bxf3 Nxd4 11.Bxb7 Rb8=; 8.Be3 Bxf3 9.gxf3 e6 10.Nc3 Be7=] 8...fxe6 9.c5 Bxf3 10.Qxf3 Nd5 11.Bb5 Qd7=

B) 7.c5!? Nd5 [7...Qxd4 8.Qxd4 Nxd4 9.cxb6 Nc2+ 10.Kd1 Nxa1 11.bxc7?] 8.Bc4 [8.Nc3?! Bf5 9.a3 e6=] 8...e6 [8...Bf5 9.Ne2 e6 10.0-0 Be7 11.Nbc3 Nxc3 12.bxc3?] 9.Nf3 Be7 10.0-0 0-0 11.Nc3



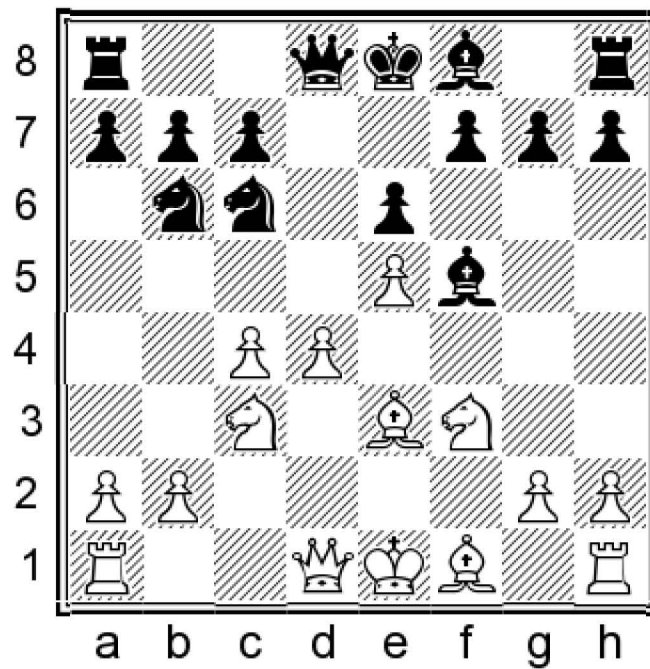
Position after: 11.Nc3

11...b6!? [11...Nxc3? 12.bxc3 b6 13.Qe1! bxc5 14.Bd3 Bd7 15.Qg3±]

B1) 12.Qe1 bxc5 13.Qg3 Kh8 [13...f5 14.Bh6 Rf7 15.Ng5 Bxg5 16.Bxg5 Qe8=; 13...cxd4 14.Bh6 g6 15.Ne4f] 14.dxc5∞

B2) 12.Ne4 bxc5 13.dxc5 Ndb4 14.a3 Qxd1 15.Rxd1 Nd5 16.b4∞/2

7...Bf5 8.Nc3 e6 9.Nf3



Position after: 9.Nf3

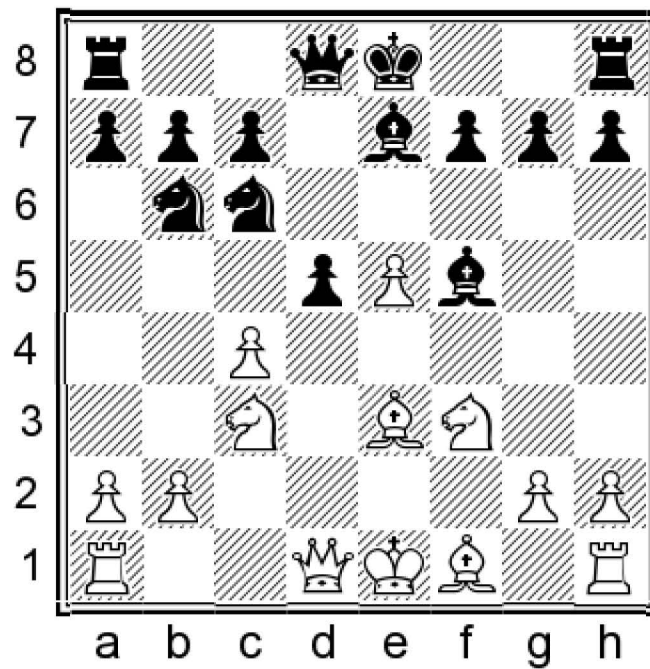
9...Be7!

A) 9...Nb4?! 10.Rc1 c5 11.Be2²

B) 9...Qd7 10.Be2 0-0-0 11.0-0 f6?! [11...Bg4!? etc.] 12.d5! Nxe5
[12...exd5 13.Bxb6 axb6 14.cxd5±] 13.Nxe5 fxe5 14.a4 a5 15.Nb5 Bb4
16.d6 Na8 17.c5+– **C)** 9...Bb4 10.Be2 0-0 11.0-0 Na5 12.c5²

10.Be2

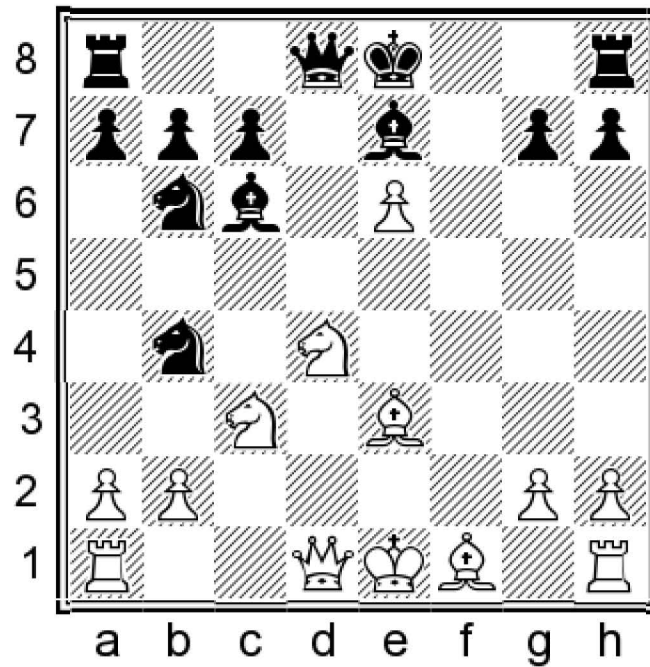
10.d5 exd5! [10...Nb4?! 11.Rc1 exd5 12.a3!±]



Position after: 10...exd5!

A) 11.Bxb6?! axb6 12.cxd5 Nb4 13.Nd4 Bg6 14.d6 [14.Bb5+?! c6!
15.dxc6 0-0f] 14...0-0!µ

B) 11.cxd5 Nb4 12.Nd4 Bd7 13.e6 [13.Qb3 0-0³; 13.Qf3 c5! 14.dxc6
Bxc6 15.Qg4 N6d5 16.Bf2∞] 13...fxe6 14.dxe6 Bc6



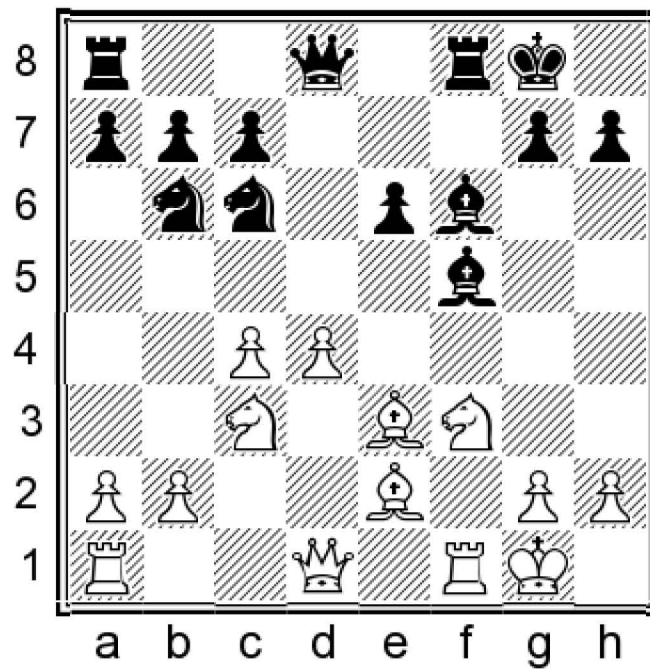
Position after: 14...Bc6

15.Qg4 [15.Qh5+ g6 16.Qh6 Bh4+ 17.g3 Bxh1 18.gxh4 Qd6³; 15.a3 Bh4+ 16.g3 Bxh1 17.axb4 Bf6 18.Qg4 0-0 19.0-0-0 Qe8=] 15...Bh4+ 16.g3 Bxh1 17.0-0-0 [17.Bb5+ c6] 17...0-0 18.gxh4 Qf6 19.Bb5 [19.Bh3 Bf3 20.Nxf3 Qxf3=] 19...c6 20.Bg5 [20.Rxh1] 20...Bf3 21.Nxf3 Qxf3 22.Qxf3 Rxf3=

10...0-0 11.0-0 f6! 12.exf6

12.d5 Nxe5 13.Nxe5 fxe5 14.g4 Bg6 15.dxe6=

12...Bxf6



Position after: 12...Bxf6

From now on everything that follows is between equal and slightly better for White.

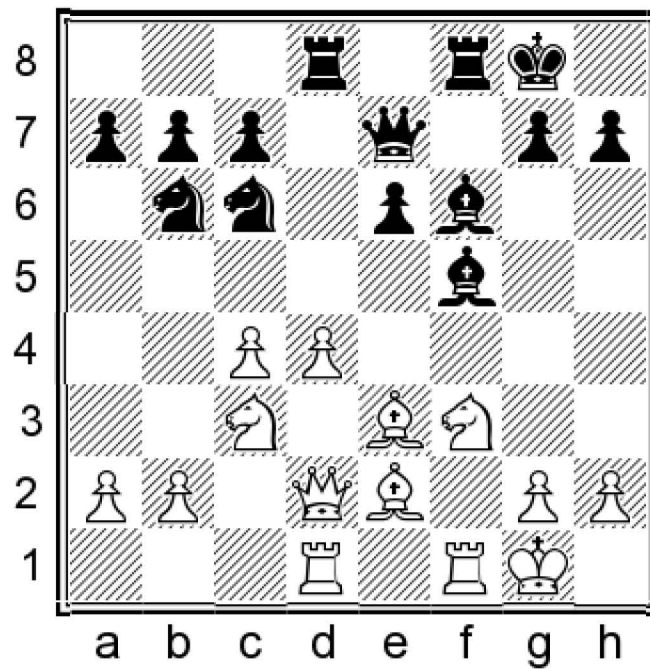
13.Qd2

13.b3 Qe8, 13.a3 Qe8 and 13.Rc1 are also possible.

13...Qe7 14.Rad1

Same with 14.Rae1 and 14.c5 Nd5, leading to unclear positions.

14...Rad8



Position after: 14...Rad8

15.Qc1

15.Qe1 Nb4 or 15.Kh1 could be playable as well, with an unclear game ahead of us.

15...h6 16.Kh1

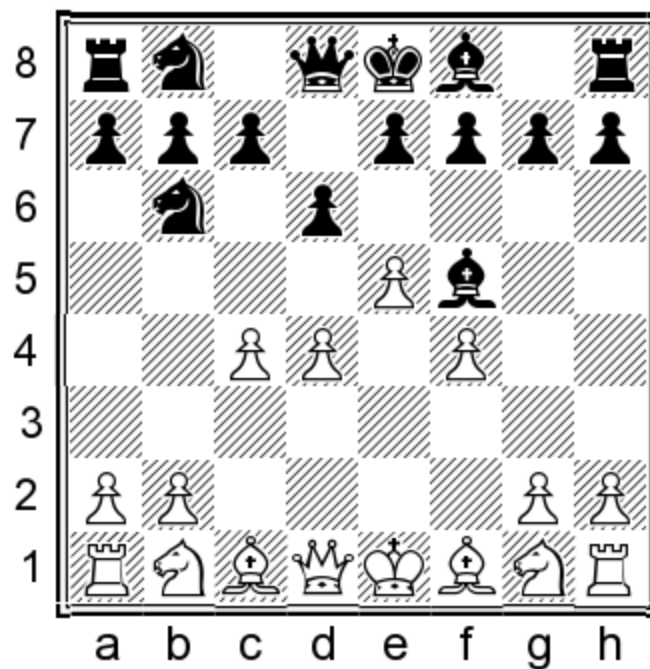
16.d5, 16.Rd2.

16...Kh8 17.h3 Bh7 ∞

17...Rd7 18.d5.

e) 4.c4 Nb6 5.f4 Bf5 (Compilation) This section provides you with a compilation of games played in 2020, in which the theme is the Classical Line of the Four Pawns Attack. The “human” games were all contested at a fast time-control except for the Parkanyi – Jakab one, whereas the time control for the computer duels was longer.

1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.c4 Nb6 5.f4 Bf5

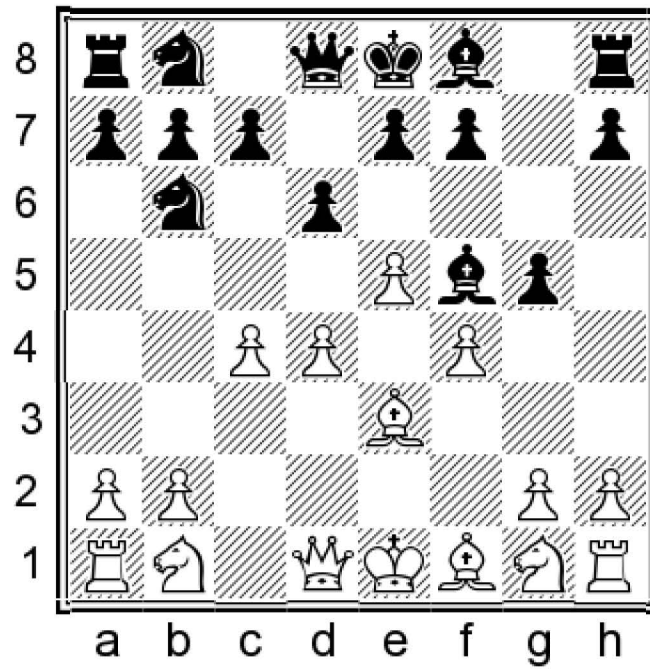


Position after: 5...Bf5

6.Nc3

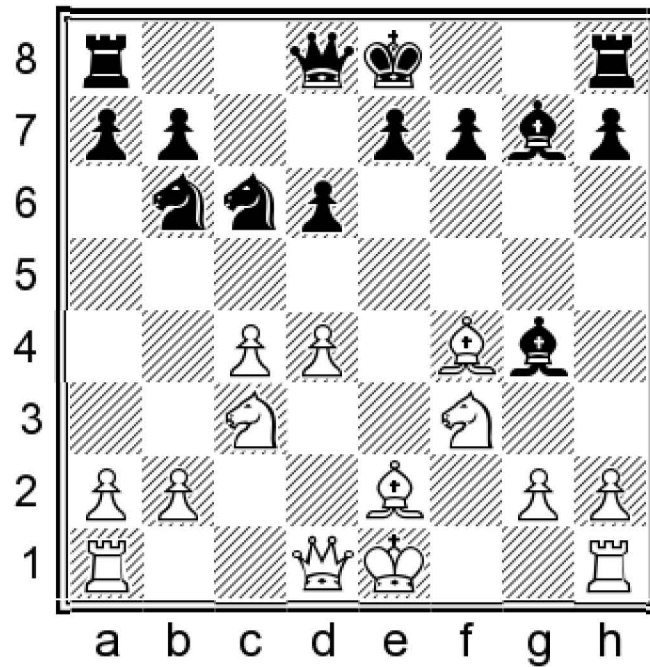
6.Be3 Much rarer than 6.Nc3 as it gives Black extra options. 6...g5!? This novelty, invited by 6.Be3, was found over the board by a teammate.

Objectively Black shouldn't fully equalize, but the g-pawn thrust certainly had some surprise and psychological value since Black seems to succeed in destroying the enemy center “whatever happens”.



Position after: 6...g5!?

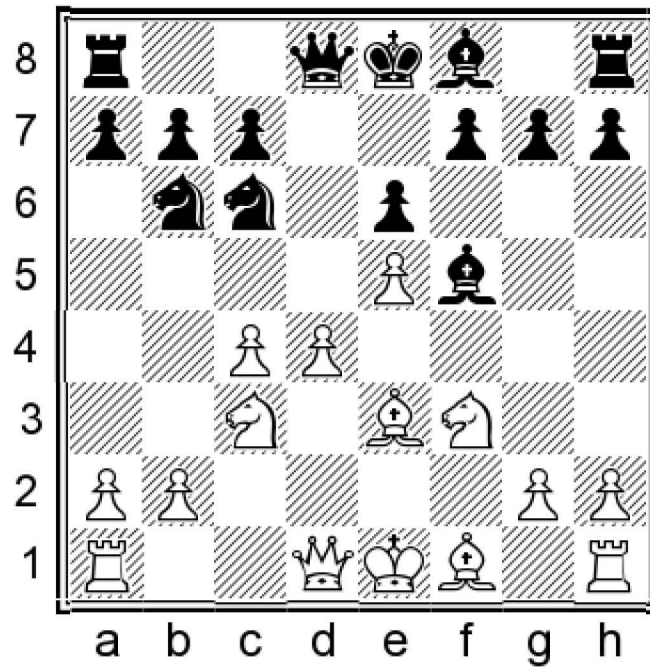
7.Nc3 [7.fxg5 dxe5 8.Nf3 Nc6 9.d5 Nb4 10.Na3 e6 and 7.exd6 gxf4 8.Bxf4 cxd6 are chaotic and perhaps somewhat in White's favor too.] 7...gxf4 8.Bxf4 Bg7 9.Nf3 Nc6 10.exd6 cxd6 11.Be2 Bg4



Position after: 11...Bg4

So far White has done reasonably OK but he now loses his edge. 12.Be3?!
 [12.0-0! intending 12...Bxf3 13.Bxf3 Bxd4+ 14.Kh1©.] 12...Bxf3
 [12...d5!?] 13.gxf3 e5 14.dxe5 Nxc4! 15.Bf2 N4xe5∞ Parkanyi, A – Jakab,
 A Hungary 2020.

6...e6 7.Be3 dxe5 8.fxe5 Nc6 9.Nf3

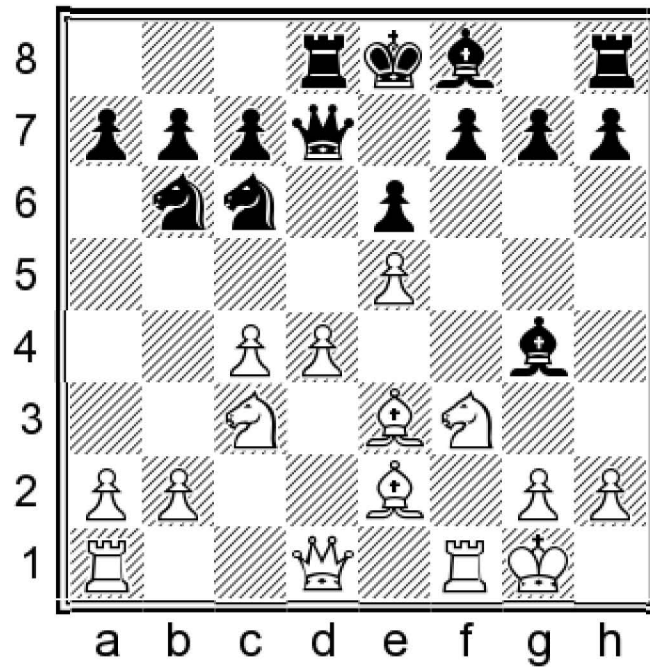


Position after: 9.Nf3

9...Be7

A) 9...Bb4 10.Rc1 [The main move, 10.Be2, is three times more frequent.]
 10...Na5 [10...Bg4!?] 11.a3 Naxc4 12.Bg5 Bxc3+ [12...f6!?] 13.Rxc3 Qd5
 14.Qc1 [14.Qe2!] 14...Qe4+? [14...Na5³] 15.Kf2² Jones, G (2670) –
 Bortnyk, O (2598) chess.com 2020.

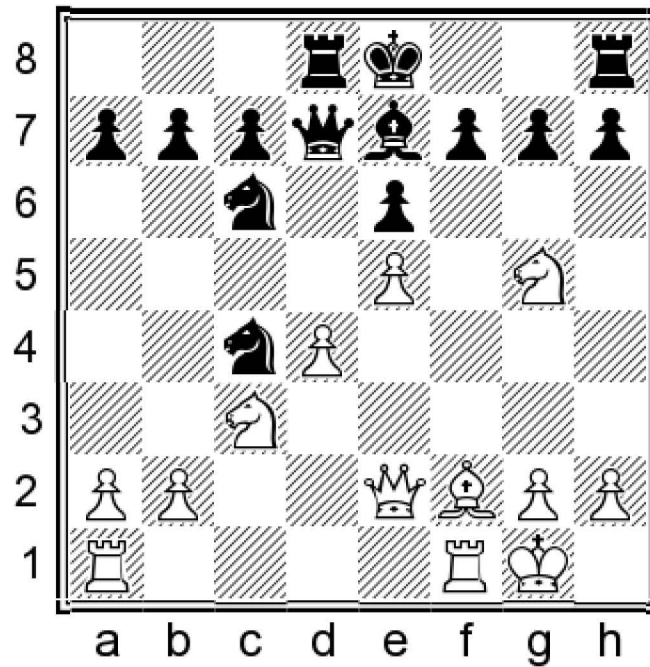
B) 9...Bg4 10.Be2 Qd7 11.0-0 Rd8 Postponing short castling for the purpose of pressing on d4 is a risky strategy, but deep analysis is required if one hopes to demonstrate more than a slight advantage for White. Some sample lines follow.



Position after: 11...Rd8

B1) 12.d5 Bxf3 [12...exd5? 13.Bxb6±] 13.Bxf3 Nxe5∞

B2) 12.Ng5 Nxc4 13.Bf2 [13.Bxc4!? Bxd1 14.Raxd1© Raja, H (2472) – Chighladze, I (2335) chess.com 2020. Objectively Black is doing alright but defending this accurately in a blitz game is no easy task.; 13.Rxf7 Nxe3 14.Rxd7 Nxd1 15.Rxd8+ Nxd8= This has been tested in practice on a few occasions.] 13...Bxe2 14.Qxe2 Be7

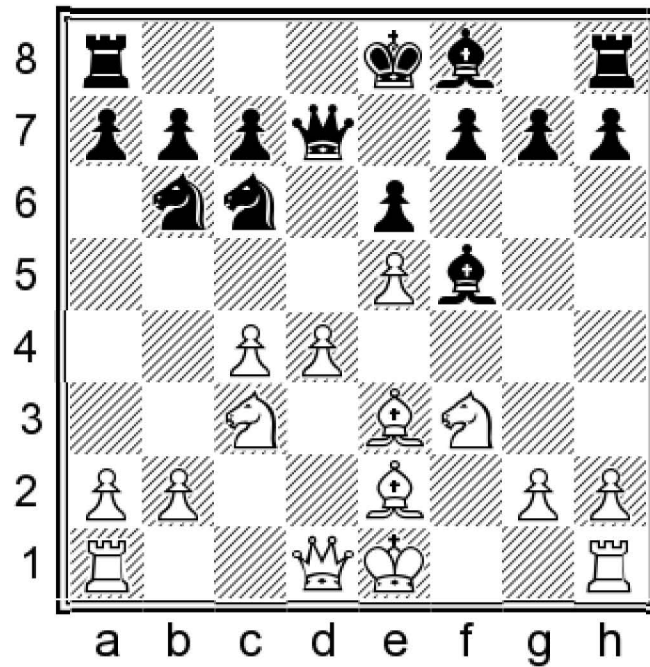


Position after: 14...Be7

At this stage White can restore the material parity by means of 15.Nxf7 Kxf7 16.Qxc4, but he may not have much after 16...Rh8. Instead 15.Nge4 Nb6 16.Qg4© looks promising.

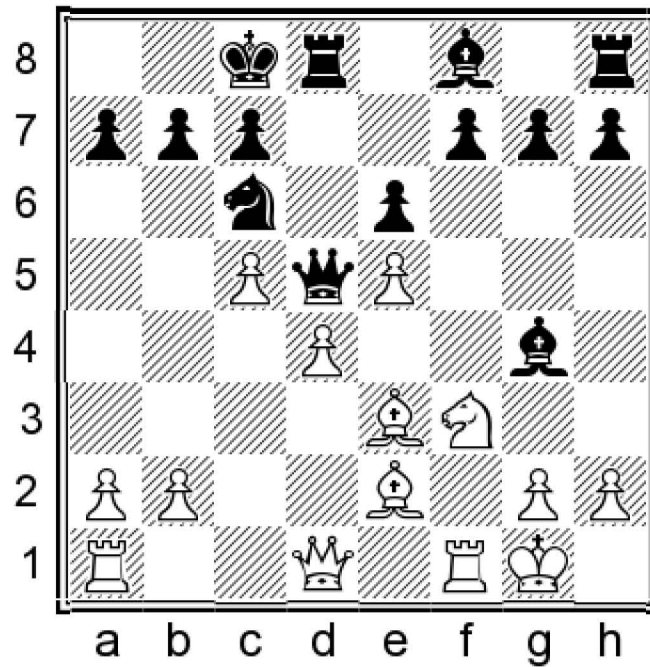
B3) 12.c5 Nd5 13.Nxd5 Qxd5 14.h3 Bf5 15.Qd2 a6 16.b4 Be7 17.Qc3 0-0 18.a4 a5 19.bxa5 Ra8 20.Nd2 Nxa5∞ Ethereal 12.01 (3810) – AllieStein tcec-chess.com 2020.

C) 9...Qd7 10.Be2



Position after: 10.Be2

10...0-0-0?! After castling long Black experiences difficulties. [10...Rd8 11.0-0 Is given as clearly better by Kornev, who stops here. Now 11...Bg4 transposes into 9...Bg4 and could be “bearable” for Black, i.e. not more than ², see the related sample lines.]. 11.0-0 Bg4 12.c5 Nd5 13.Nxd5 Qxd5

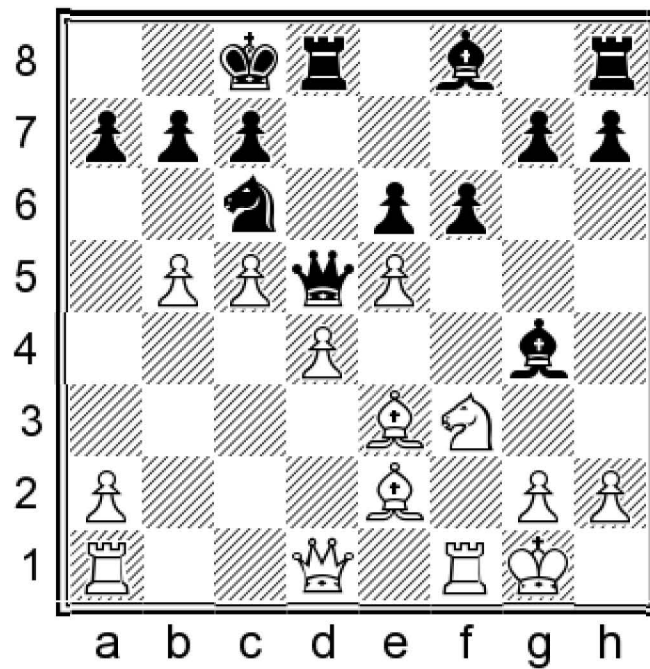


Position after: 13...Qxd5

An important crossroads where Kornev's 14.Rc1! is strong and possibly much better for White in all lines. Some fresh games have taken other directions.

C1) 14.Qc1 f6 15.Bc4 Qe4 [15...Qd7!=] 16.Qc3² Fedoseev, V (2678) – Bortnyk, O (2598) chess.com 2020.

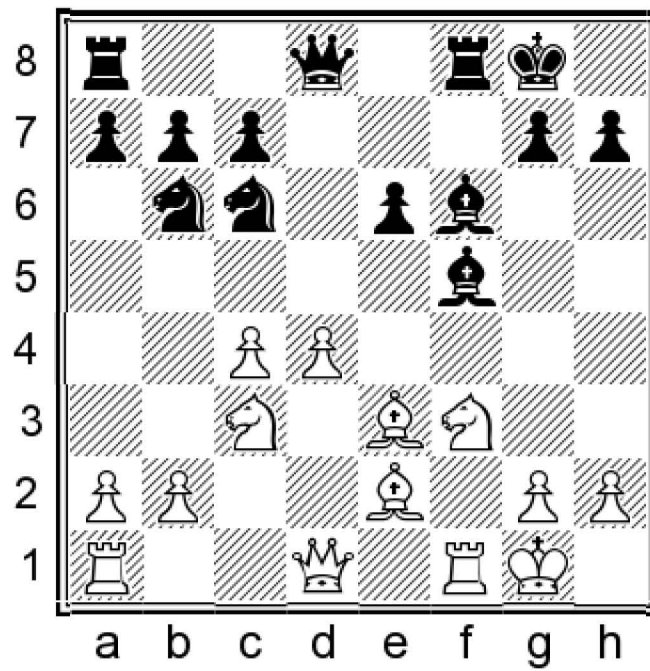
C2) 14.b4!? f6 15.b5 [15.h3 is for some reason more precise, according to the computer.]



Position after: 15.b5

15...Qe4? [15...Nxd4! 16.Nxd4 Qxe5 17.Qb3 Rxd4 18.Bxd4 Qxd4+ 19.Kh1 Bxe2 20.Qxe6+ Qd7 21.Qxe2 Bxc5 looks acceptable for Black]
 16.Qc1? [16.Qb3+–] 16...Nb4 ∞ Jones, G (2670) – Sviridov, V (2562)
 chess.com 2020.

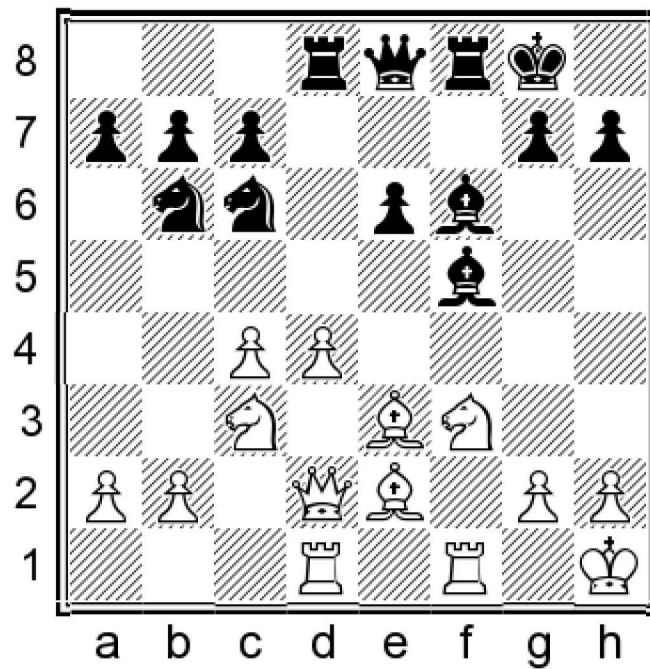
10.Be2 f6 11.0-0 0-0 12.exf6 Bxf6



Position after: 12...Bxf6

13.Qd2

A) 13.Kh1?! Qe8 14.Qd2 [On 14.Qe1 there is 14...Nb4.] 14...Rd8 15.Rad1

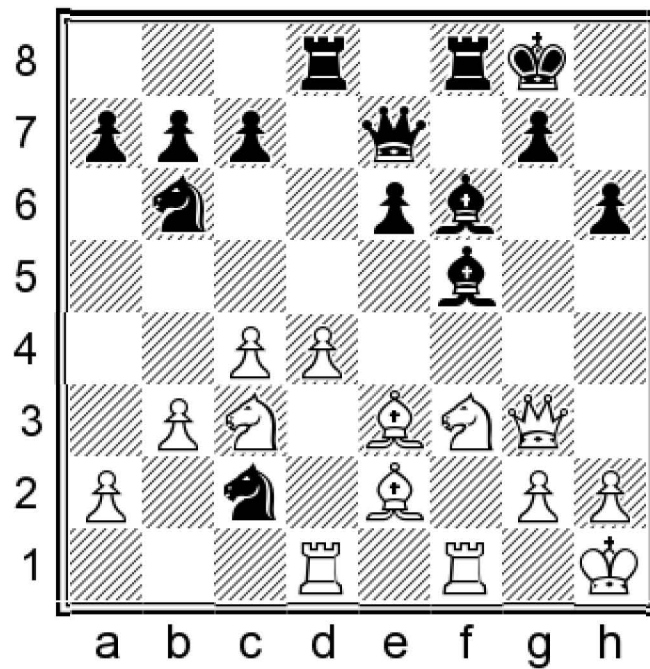


Position after: 15.Rad1

15...Nxd4 [15...Bxd4! with the idea of following up with ...e5 rather than ...c5.] 16.Nxd4? [16.Bxd4 c5 17.Qe3 was still balanced.] 16...c5 17.Ncb5 cxd4µ Giri, A (2764) – Avila Pavas, S (2393) chess.com 2020.

B) 13.b3

B1) 13...Qd7 14.Qd2 Rad8 15.Rad1 h6 16.Kh1 Qe7 17.Qe1 Nb4 18.Qg3 Nc2



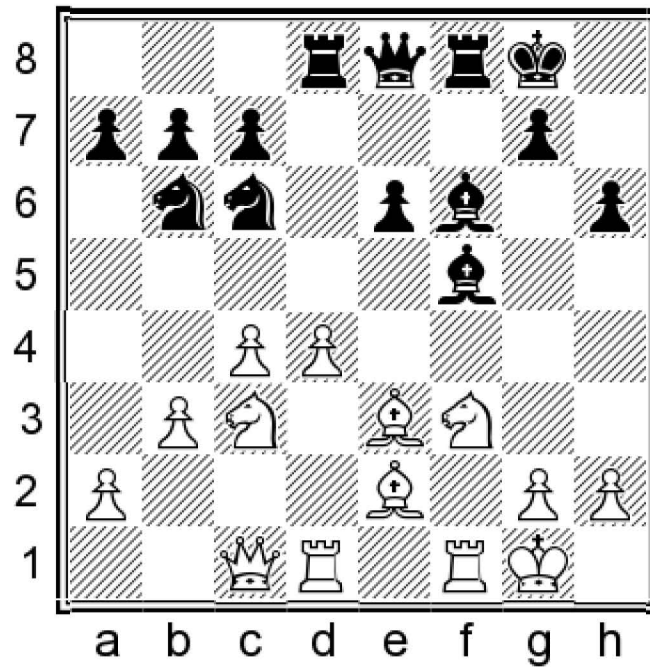
Position after: 18...Nc2

19.Bxh6 [19.Bg1!?] 19...Nxd4 20.Nxd4 Rxd4 21.Rxd4 Bxd4 22.Nb5 Bf6
23.Be3² Xiong, J (2709) – Bortnyk, O (2598) chess.com 2020.

B2) 13...Qe7 14.Qd2 Rad8 15.Rad1 Rd7 16.Qe1 h6 Jones, G (2688) –
Abasov, N (2632) chess24. com 2020.

13...Qe7

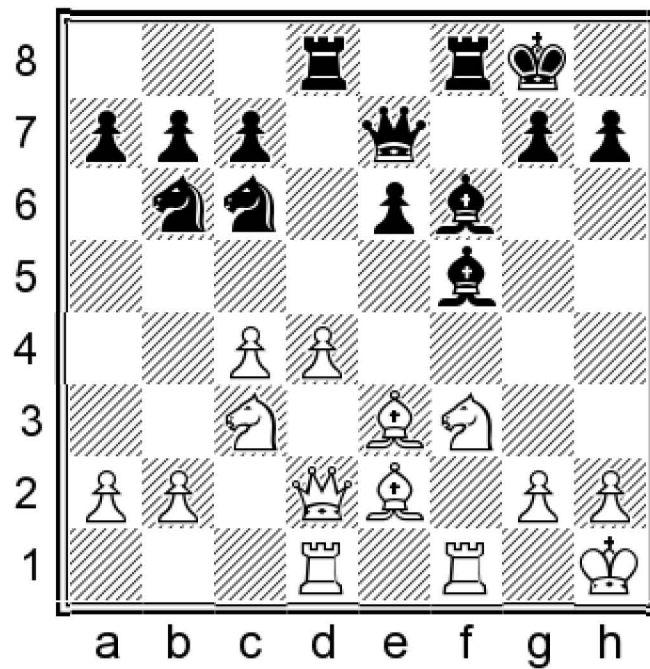
13...Qe8 14.Rad1 Rd8 15.Qc1 h6 16.b3



Position after: 16.b3

Now rather than 16...Bh7² played in Maghsoodloo, P (2676) – Fier, A (2562) chess.com 2020, the engine prefers either 16...Rf7 and possibly 17...Rfd7, to increase the pressure on d4, or 16...Qg6. In both cases, though, it gives a small edge to White.

14.Rad1 Rad8 15.Kh1



Position after: 15.Kh1

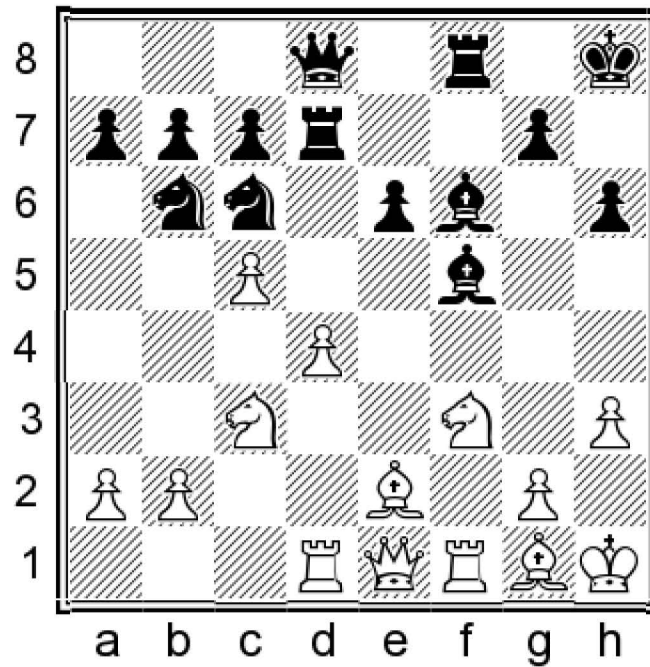
This useful move is apparently the top engines' first choice.

15...h6

15...Bg4 16.Ne4 Bxf3 17.Nxf6+ Rxf6 18.Rxf3 [18.gxf3!?] 18...Rxf3
 19.gxf3 Qf7 Black threatens 20...Nxc4 here, which would not have been the
 case after 18.gxf3. 20.Qc3 Qf6 Matinian, N (2470) – Gabrielian, A (2458)
 chess.com 2020.

16.Qc1

16.h3 Rd7 17.Qe1 Kh8 18.Bg1 Qd8 19.c5



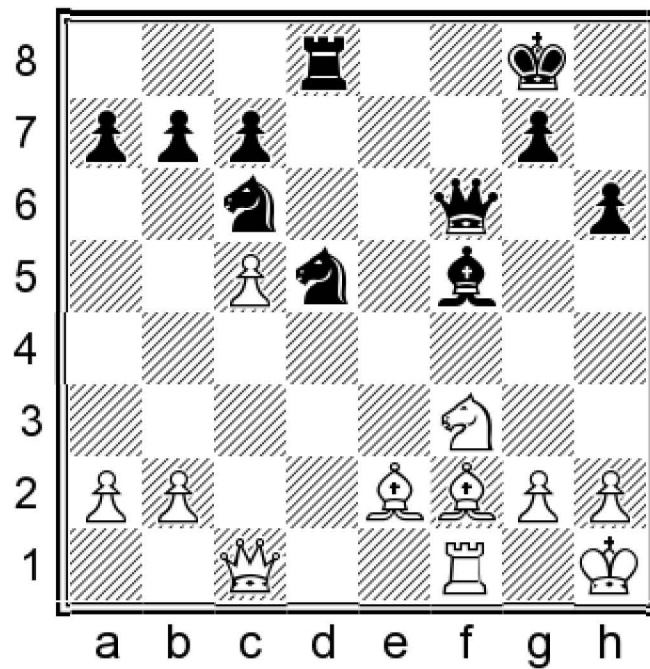
Position after: 19.c5

This way of dealing with the pressure on the d4-pawn entails the major drawback of conceding an outpost on d5. 19...Nd5 20.Bb5 Rdf7 21.Ne4 Bh7 LCZero – Stockfish tcec-chess.com 2020.

16...Rd7

16...Kh8 17.h3 Rd7 18.Bg1 a6 19.Rfe1 Bh4 20.Rf1 Bf6 21.Rd2 Qd8 22.Qd1 Na5 23.b3 Nc6² LCZero – Stockfish tcec-chess.com 2020.

17.d5 exd5 18.Nxd5 Qf7 19.Nxf6+ Qxf6 20.c5 Rxd1 21.Qxd1 Rd8 22.Qc1 Nd5 23.Bf2²

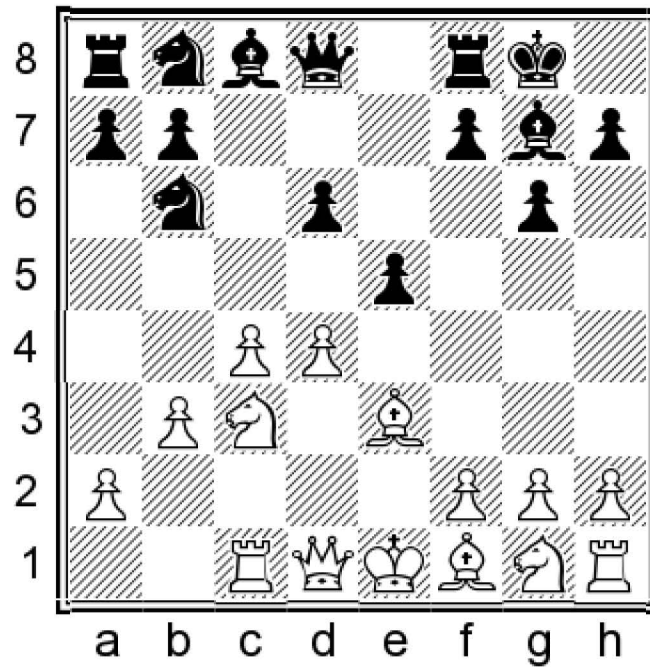


Position after: 23.Bf2

Stockfish – LCZero TCEC 20 Premier 2020.

f) Voronezh Ending with 11.c5

**1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.c4 Nb6 5.exd6 cxd6 6.Nc3 g6 7.Be3 Bg7
8.Rc1 0-0 9.b3 e5**

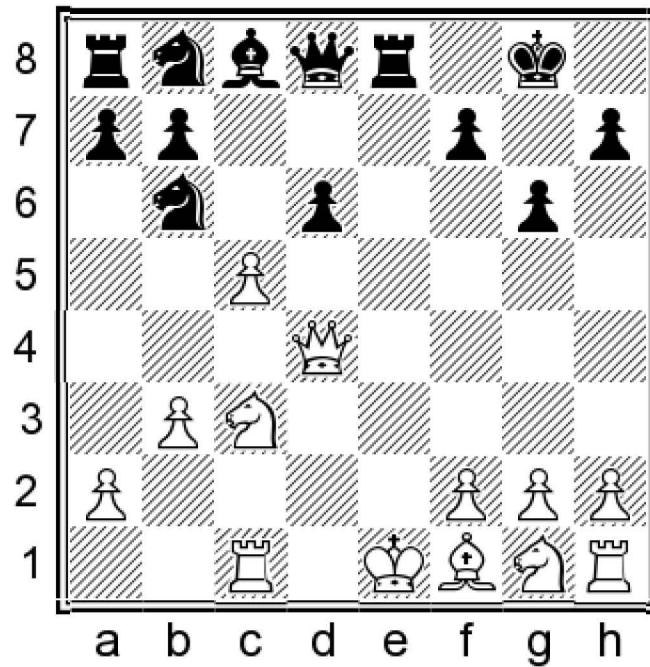


Position after: 9...e5

As mentioned before, Kornev reckons that this is Black's only way to fight for equality, not even mentioning the alternatives. Although offering a repertoire implies making choices, since covering every single line is impossible, I find it a bit harsh because many other black options do make sense (for example 9...Bf5, the move that earns my preference).

10.dxe5

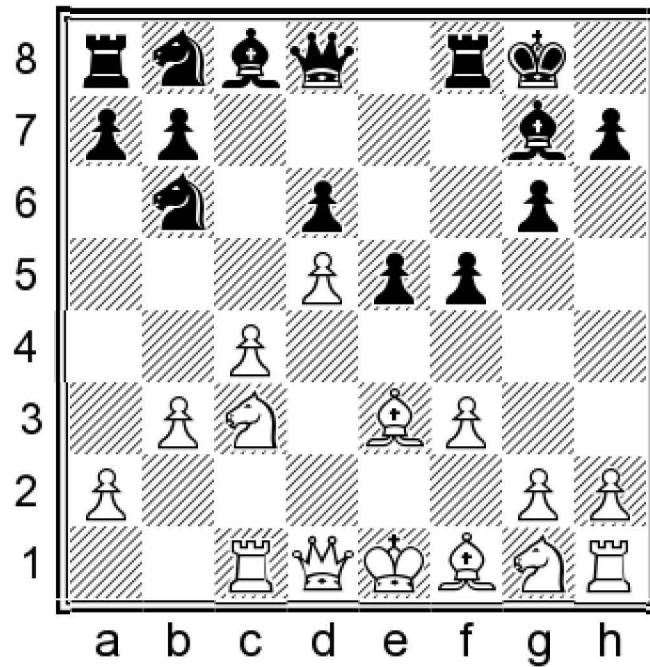
A) 10.c5? is tactically refuted by 10...exd4! 11.Bxd4 Bxd4 12.Qxd4 Re8+



Position after: 12...Re8+

and however White covers the check he emerges clearly worse, for instance after 13.Be2 Qg5 or 13.Nge2 N6d7 and now either 14.Qxd6 Qa5! or 14.cxd6 Nc6 15.Qd2 Nc5μ.

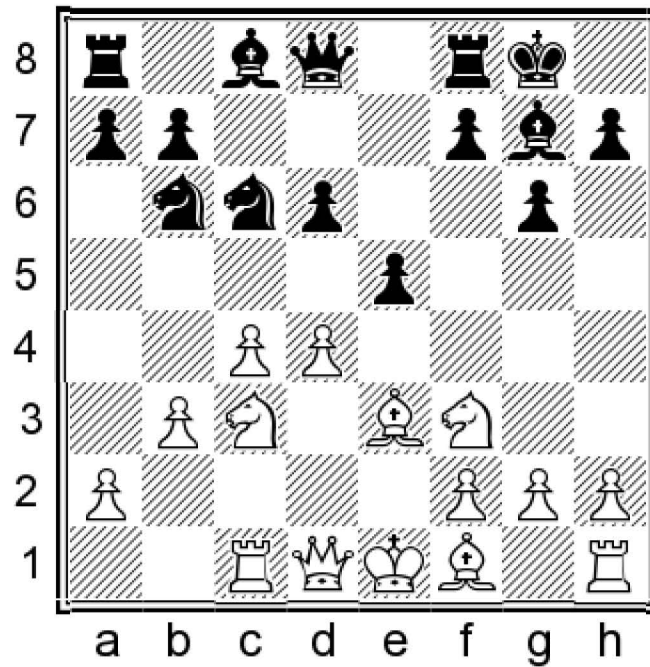
B) Closing the center with 10.d5?! isn't logical in conjunction with White's preceding play. Following 10...f5 11.f3



Position after: 11.f3

11...Na6 [or 11...N8d7!? Festa, S (2075) – Gajic, M (2246) Gibraltar 2014, when that knight may jump to f6 at a later stage] 12.Be2 Qh4+ 13.Bf2 Qe7 Black has interesting prospects on the kingside.

C) Finally 10.Nf3 is less demanding from Black if White then opts for an endgame, while chances in the middlegame are about level. Play may continue 10...Nc6, with a split.



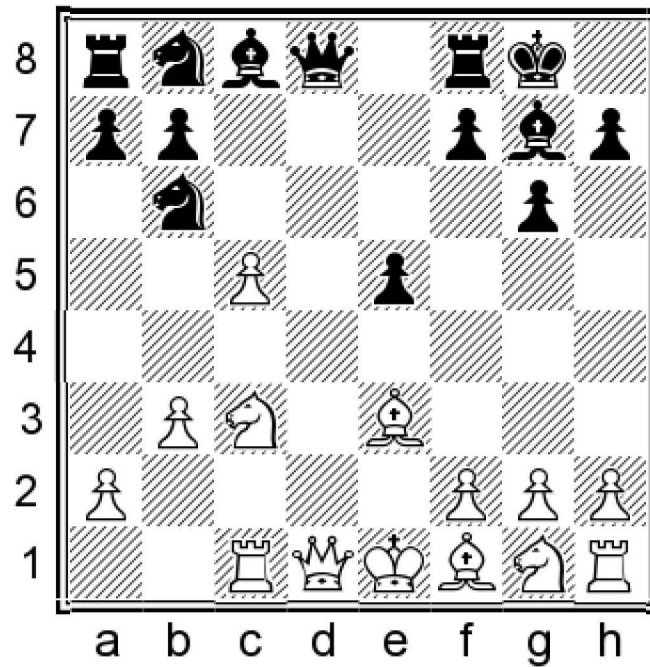
Position after: 10...Nc6

C1) 11.d5 Ne7,,

C2) 11.dxe5 dxe5 12.Be2 Qe7, or else 12.Qxd8 Rxd8. Should White now play in the same vein as after 10.dxe5, namely push 13.c5, then the extra option 13...Nd5 is available for his opponent.

C3) Lastly 11.Be2 Bg4 12.d5 Ne7 or 12.dxe5 dxe5 13.h3 Bxf3 14.Bxf3 f5 15.c5 Nd7 16.Bd5+ Kh8= Everywhere Black gets his share of play.

10...dxe5 11.c5



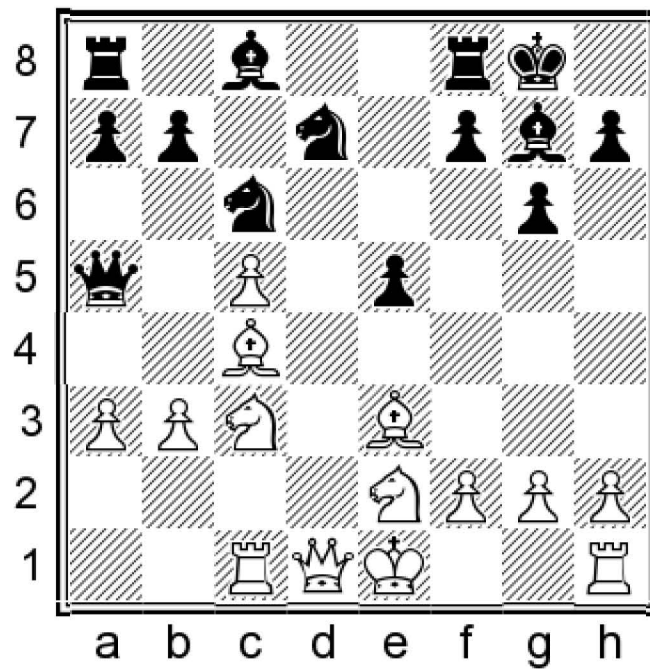
Position after: 11.c5

Instead of a supposedly risk-free slightly better ending (reached after 11.Qxd8, see the next subchapter) White enters a middlegame offering mutual chances. Here are some examples of it, but first note that 11...Qxd1+? would have been a concession, leaving White much better after 12.Rxd1 N6d7 13.Nf3± or 13.Bc4±.

11...N6d7 12.Nf3

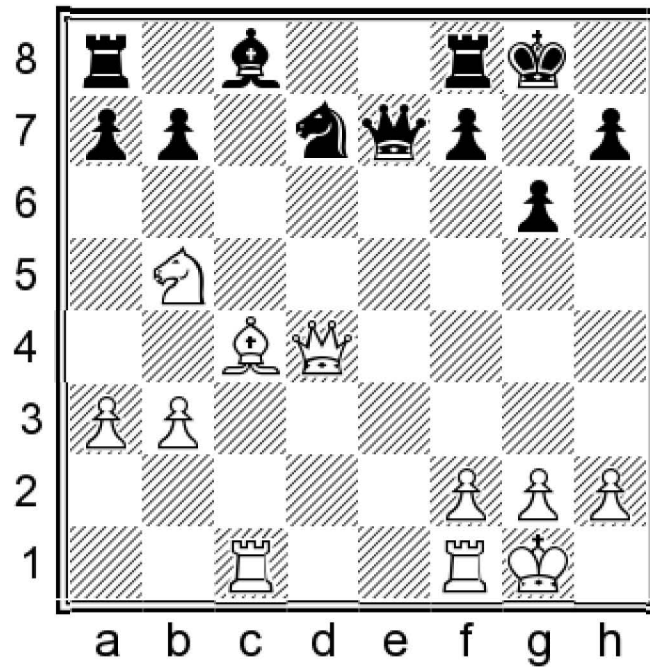
12.Bc4

A) Here 12...Nc6 is Kornev's recommendation (see line B), but 12...Qa5 seems fine as well provided Black knows what he's doing. 13.Nge2 Nc6 [In the event of 13...Nxc5? 14.Qd5 Black doesn't lose material immediately thanks to 14...Nbd7, but his pieces are then paralyzed 15.0-0±] 14.a3



Position after: 14.a3

A1) 14...Nd4 15.0-0 [15.Nxd4 exd4 16.Bxd4 Re8+ 17.Kf1 Bxd4 18.Qxd4 Qxa3 19.Qf4 Nf6 20.Nb5 Qb2 21.Nd6 Be6 This was only around equal in Rowson, J (2490) – Baburin, A (2593) Port Erin 1999.] 15...Qxc5 16.Nb5 Qe7 17.Nexd4 exd4 18.Bxd4 Bxd4? [18...Rd8²] 19.Qxd4±

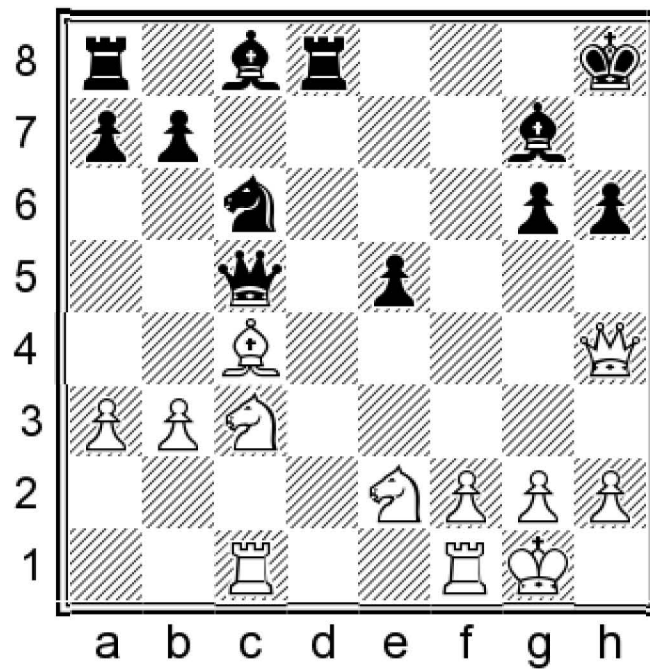


Position after: 19.Qxd4±

Black had trouble finishing his development in Antal, G (2495) – Pechenkin, V (2372) Edmonton 2009.

A2) 14...Qxa3?? 15.Ra1 Qb4 16.Ra4 traps the queen.

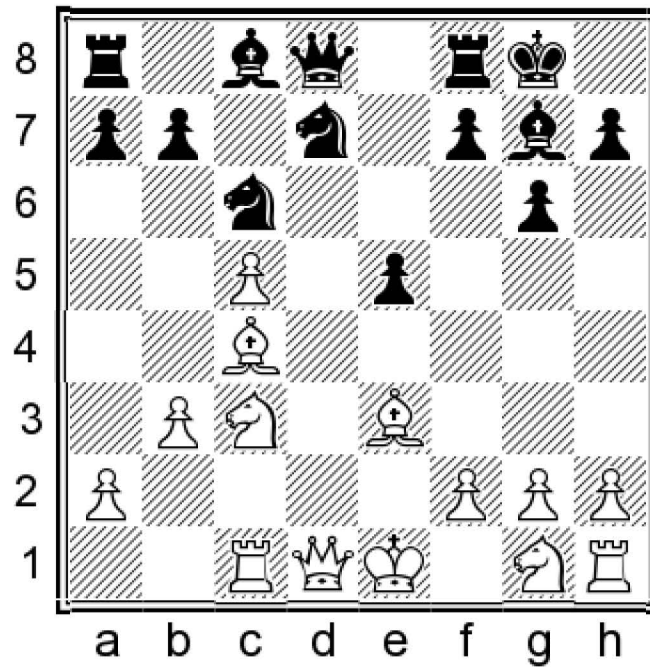
A3) 14...Rd8! 15.Qd5 [White can force a draw if he wishes here, with 15.b4 Qxa3 16.Ra1 Qxb4 17.Ra4 Qb2 18.Ra2=.] 15...Nf6 16.Qxf7+ Kh8 17.Bh6 Bxh6 18.Qxf6+ Bg7 19.Qh4 h6 20.0-0 Qxc5



Position after: 20...Qxc5

The email game Kilichenko, A (2363) – Schmidt, L (2331) ICCF 2013 soon ended peacefully. Every single move was more or less optimal after 11.c5.

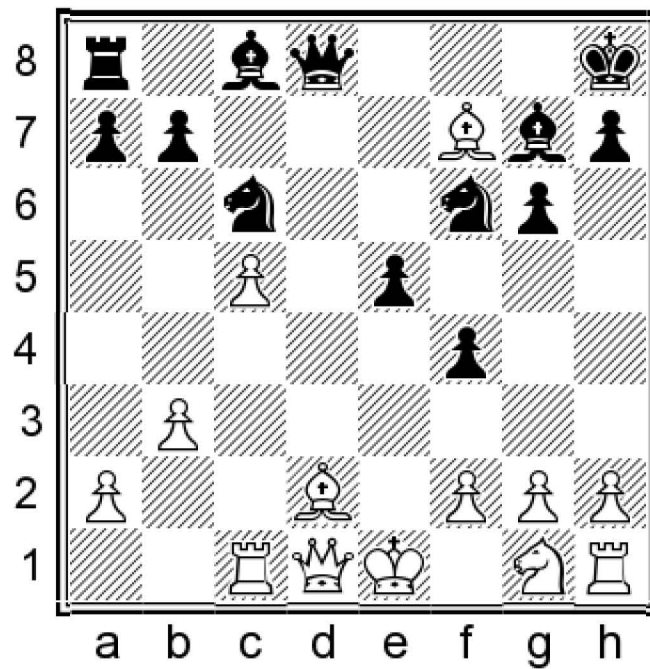
B) 12...Nc6



Position after: 12...Nc6

At this crossroads 13.Nf3 Qa5 should transpose into 12.Nf3 Nc6, so that except for 13.Nge2 Nf6=, there remains only 13.Ne4 to be checked.

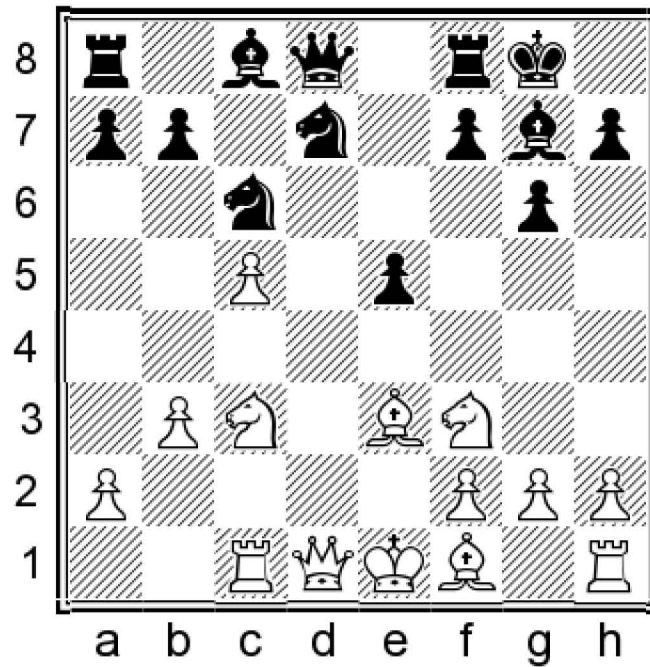
13...Qa5+ [On 13...Kh8?!/!?, intending 14.Nd6?! f5! 15.Nf7+?! Rxf7 16.Bxf7 f4 17.Bd2 Nf6



Position after: 17...Nf6

Black's compensation is more than sufficient. The problem is that his opponent can improve with 14.h4!, when the computer fancies the white chances.] 14.Bd2 [Kornev only analyzes 14.Qd2 which he rightly assesses as equal.] 14...Qc7 15.Ne2 Now both 15...Nf6 and 15...b6 need further investigation and should give Black a decent game.

12...Nc6



Position after: 12...Nc6

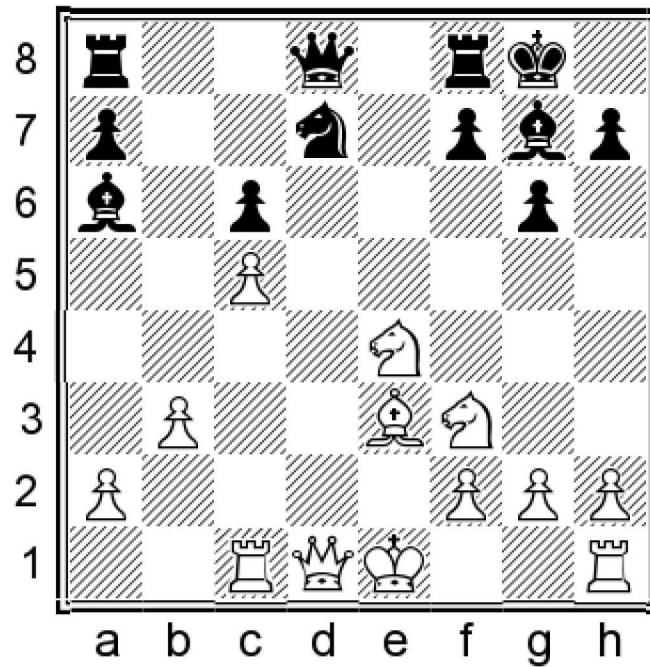
13.Bc4

13.Bb5!? stops ...b6 but allows 13...e4!.

A) 14.Nxe4?? Qa5+--+

B) 14.Nd4 Nxc5,,

C) 14.Bxc6 bxc6 [Kornev's suggestion of 14...Bxc3+ is plainly valid too 15.Rxc3 bxc6∞. Besides ...Ba6, in order to prevent White from castling, ...Ne5 and ...f7-f5 are on Black's agenda.] 15.Nxe4 Ba6© White has grabbed a pawn and will plonk a powerful knight on d6, but at the same time it is obvious that being unable to castle will seriously bother him.



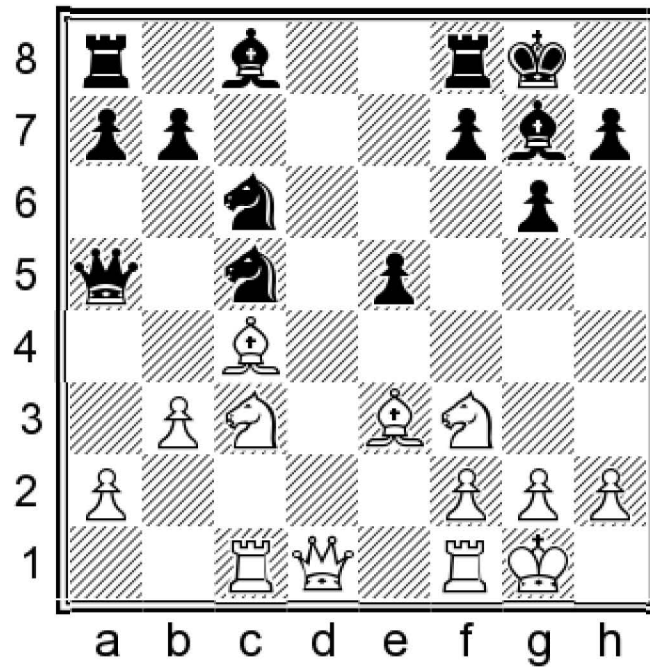
Position after: 15...Ba6

This position was reached in Giaccio, A (2460) – Soppe, G (2455) Villa Martelli 1998, which continued 16.Nd6 Bb2 [16...Qe7!?] 17.Rc2 Ba3 18.Qd4 Qe7 with unclear play.

13...Qa5

Black should strive for a maximum of complications since after the inaccurate 13...b6?! 14.Bg5! he stands a bit worse.

14.0-0 Nxc5



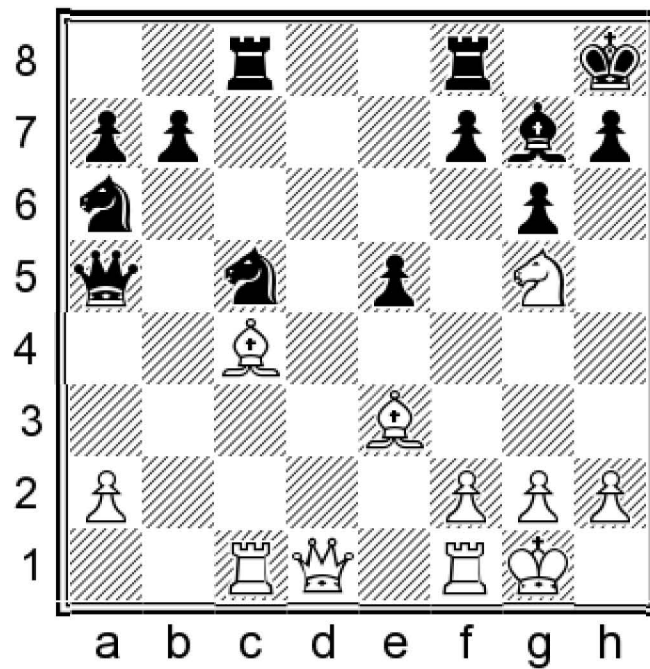
Position after: 14...Nxc5

15.b4!?

15.Ng5 Be6 16.Nxe6 Nxe6 17.Bxe6 fxe6= To compensate for his shattered pawns, Black has one more of them and a stronghold for his knight on d4.

15...Nxb4 16.Nd5 Nxd5

16...Nba6? is inferior in view of 17.Ne7+ Kh8 18.Nxc8 Raxc8 19.Ng5.

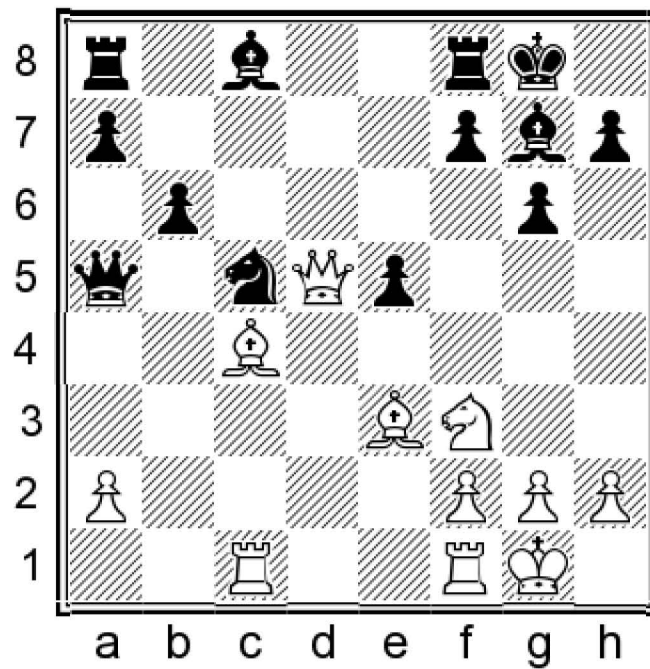


Position after: 19.Ng5

White had a sizeable edge in Bokros, A (2405) – Konopka, M (2484) Pardubice 1999, where he eventually prevailed. I shall continue that game for a few more moves since for the time being Black was still two pawns up: 19...Rc7 20.Nxf7+ Rxf7 21.Bxf7 Rxf7 22.Bxc5 Nxc5 23.Qd5 Rd7 24.Qxc5 Qxc5 25.Rxc5±.

17.Qxd5 b6

A critical position.

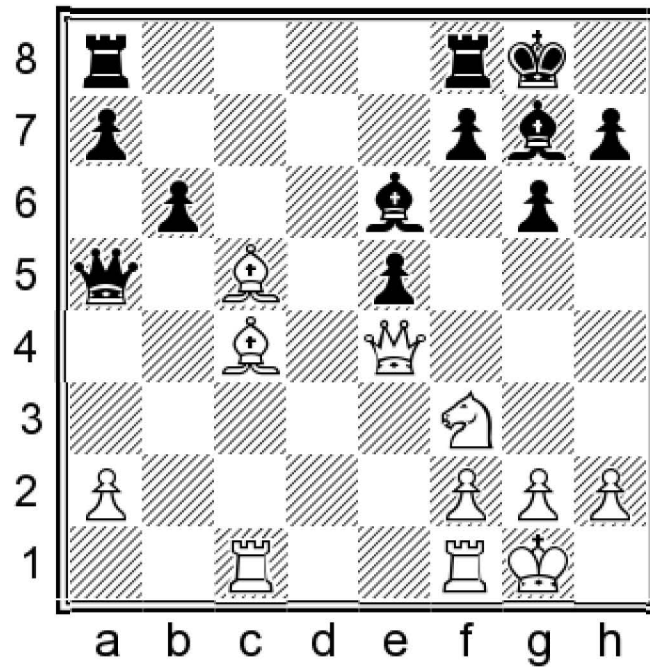


Position after: 17...b6

18.Bxc5

18.Qxa8 should be balanced too after 18...Bb7 19.Qxf8+ Kxf8, whereas 19.Bxf7+?! Kxf7 20.Rxc5 Rxa8 21.Rxa5 bxa5³ Morano, A (2350) – Poleschi, R (2322) email 2000 is an ending where Black has reasonable chances to score the full point.

18...Be6 19.Qe4



Position after: 19.Qe4

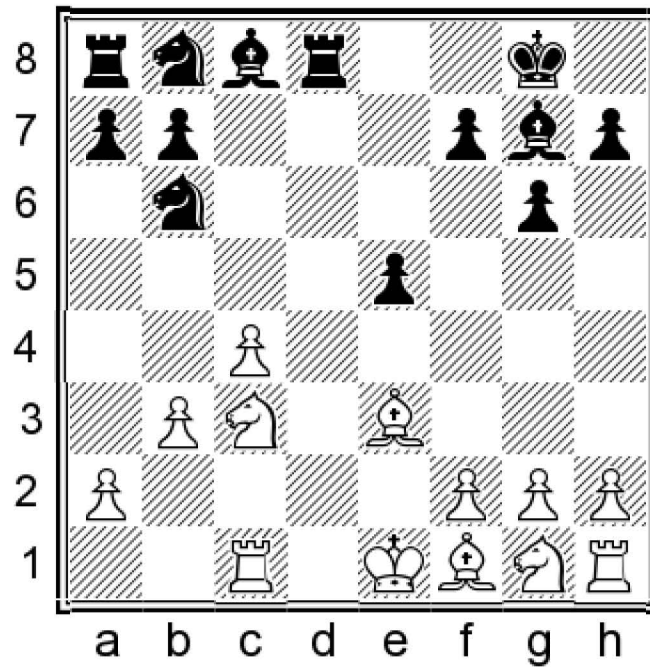
At this point 19...bxc5 20.Bxe6 fxe6 gives White typical positional compensation, while 19...Bf5 20.Bxf7+ Kh8 ∞ is messy.

g) Voronezh Ending with 11.Qxd8

**1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.c4 Nb6 5.exd6 cxd6 6.Nc3 g6 7.Be3 Bg7
8.Rc1 0-0 9.b3 e5 10.dxe5 dxe5 11.Qxd8**

Much more popular than 11.c5.

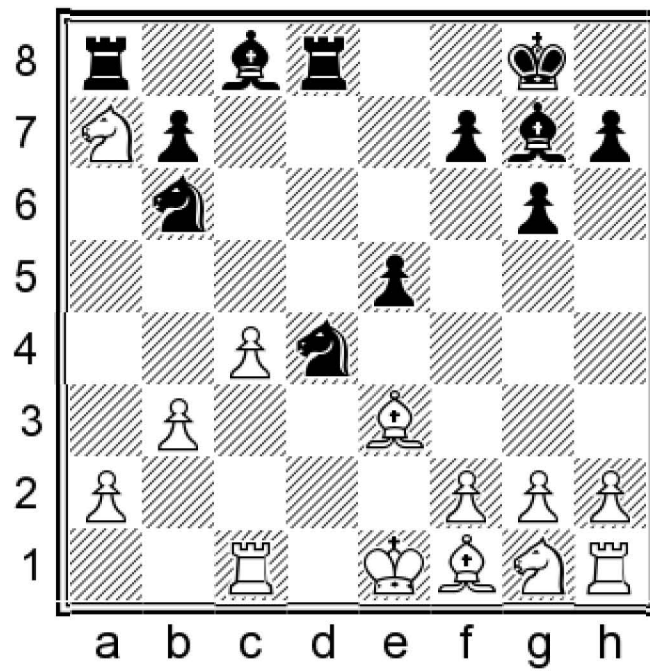
11...Rxd8



Position after: 11...Rxd8

12.c5!

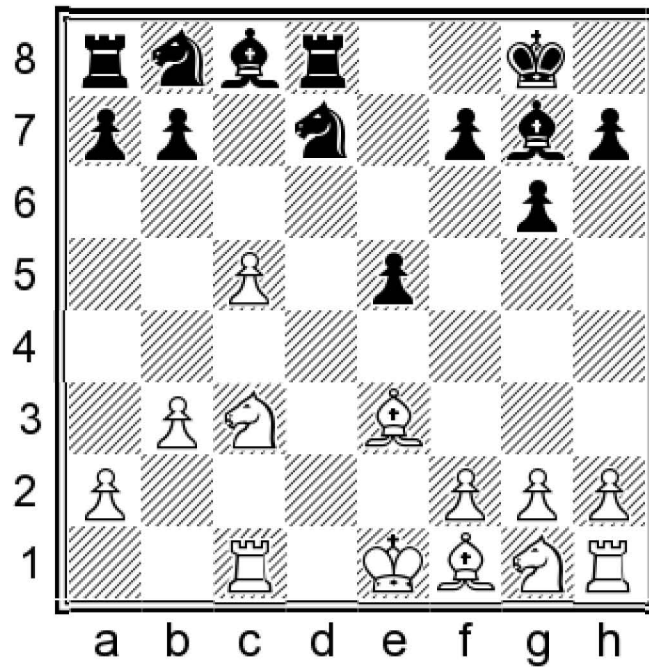
The greedy 12.Nb5 contravenes elementary chess principles. No wonder then, that Black achieves a good game thanks to a small material investment: 12...Nc6 13.Nxa7 Nd4



Position after: 13...Nd4

14.Nxc8 Rdxc8 15.Bxd4 exd4 16.a4 Nd7 or 16.Rc2 Ra3.

12...N6d7



Position after: 12...N6d7

13.Bc4

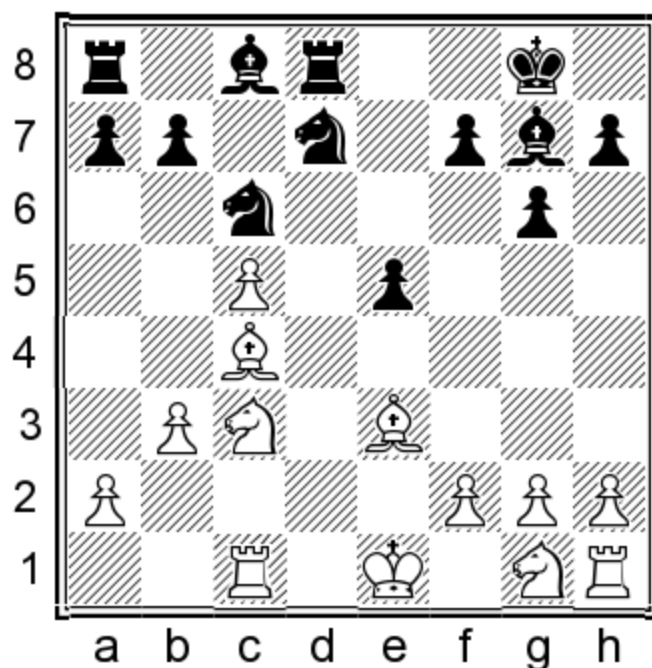
A) 13.Nf3 Nf8 [the more circumspect 13...Nc6 14.Bc4 should transpose into 13.Bc4] 14.Nb5 Nc6 15.Nd6 a5? [15...Rb8² was better] 16.Bc4 This occurred in Kovalenko, I (2645) – Neiksans, A (2557) chess.com 2020 and gave White a marked edge, but 16.Ng5! was even stronger.

B) In the event of the time-consuming 13.Nb5 Nc6 14.Nd6 it is no wonder Black has an antidote to the looming Bc4, namely 14...e4!? 15.Nxe4 Nb4 with counterplay. Besides ...Nxa2 the other jumps ...Ne5 and ...Nd5 are in the air.

13...Nc6

Black now wants to repel the annoying bishop by means of ...Na5, or bounce to d4, depending on the circumstances.

The pawn sacrifice 13...e4!? is not as efficient as in the variation 13.Nb5, but still a very acceptable option. 14.Nxe4 Ne5 Now rather than 15.Be2 Nbc6 16.Nf3 Nb4,, Privoznik, L (2430) – Nepustil, F (2372) ICCF email 2015, White may count on a slight plus following 15.Nf3 Nxc4 16.bxc4 Nc6 17.0-0.

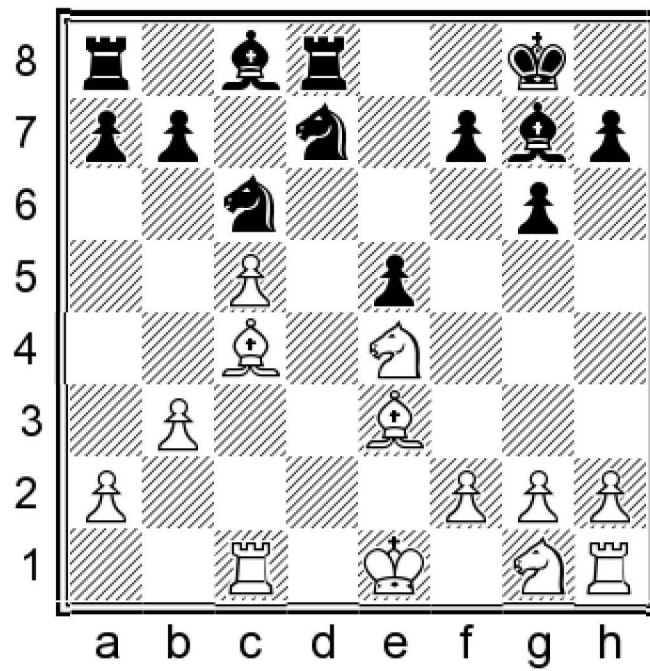


Position after: 13...Nc6

14.Nf3

This move, by far White's most popular and logical, appears in about 80 percent of the games where the position after 13...Nc6 has been reached. After having developed his last minor piece, White threatens Ng5, or possibly Nd2-e4 should his opponent prevent the former by ...h7-h6, all of which explains why 14.Nge2 is inferior.

14.Ne4!? is a pretty decent alternative, but Black has several ways to deal with it.

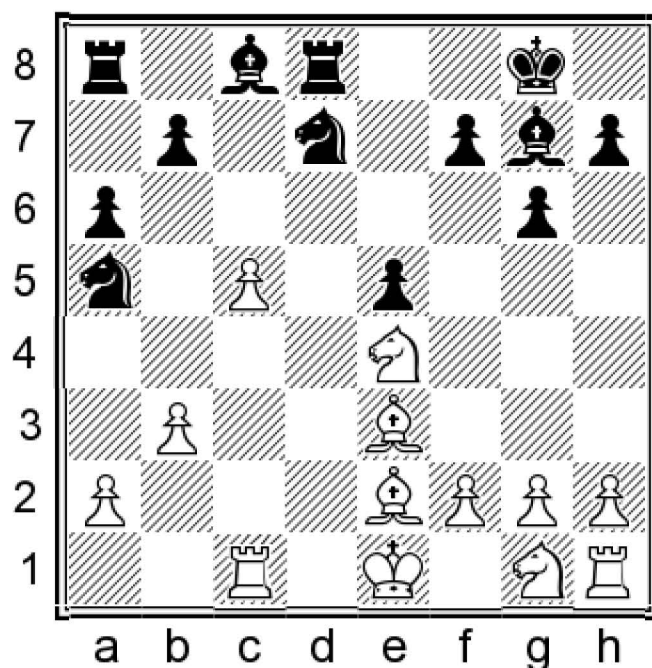


Position after: 14.Ne4!?

A) 14...Na5

A1) Now 15.Be2 Nf6 doesn't change much.

A2) 15.Bb5 a6 16.Be2



Position after: 16.Be2

16...Nf6! Kornev's novelty and definitely an improvement over 16...h6.
17.Bg5 Nxe4 18.Bxd8 Bh6 19.Rd1 Nc6 20.Bb6 Nc3 21.Rd6 Be6© The engine reckons that Black has full compensation here, his ideas including ...Nxa2, ...Nd4 and ...Bf8.

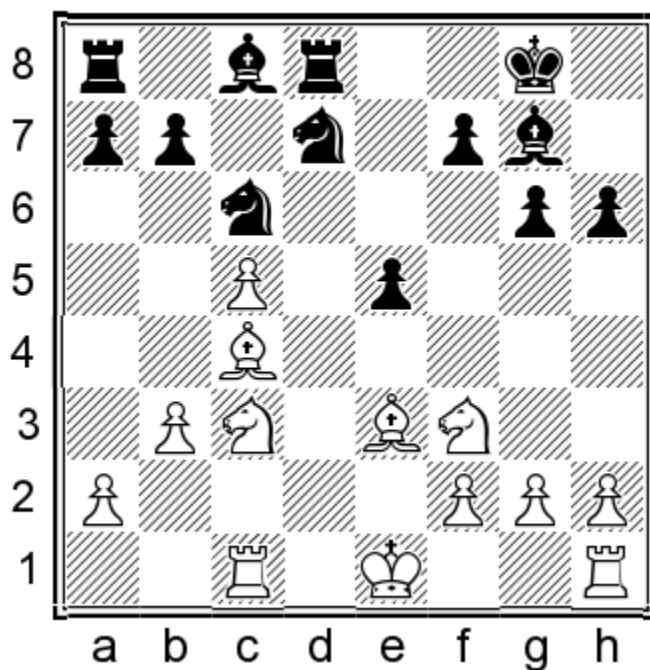
A3) After 15.Bg5 Black can also efficiently escape his rival's pressure thanks to an exchange sacrifice. 15...Nxc4 [The less flashy 15...Rf8 held too in some correspondence games.] 16.Bxd8 Nb2 17.Kd2 f5 18.Kc2 Nd3 19.Kxd3 fxe4+ 20.Kxe4 Nxc5+ 21.Rxc5 Bf5+ 22.Kf3 Rxd8©

B) 14...Nf6!? 15.Nd6 Rd7 16.Nf3 Bf8 17.Rd1 Bxd6 18.Rxd6 Rxd6 19.cxd6 Ne8 Black soon fully equalized in Staroske, U (2407) – Vlasveld, W (2497) ICCF email 2010.

C) 14...Nf8 15.Nd6 Be6 16.Nxb7 Rdb8 17.Nd6 Bxc4 18.Rxc4 a5 19.Ne2 a4 20.Nc1 f5,, Black had enough counterplay for the pawn in Ovcharenko, L (2294) – Malchev, E (2343) email 2014.

14...h6!

Even if Black has managed to successfully defend his somewhat awkward position following 14...Na5?! 15.Be2 b6 16.0-0 bxc5, there is no doubt that White enjoys a risk-free plus after 17.Ne4².



Position after: 14...h6!

15.Ne4

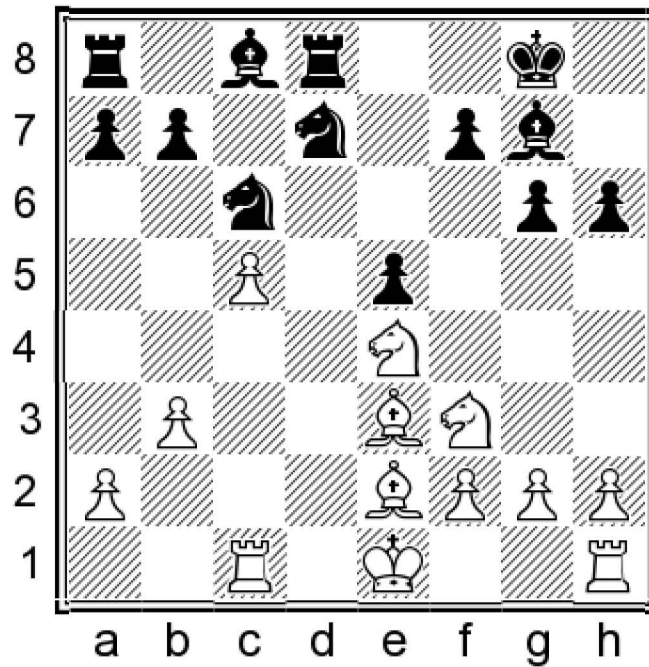
Other attempts at keeping a slight edge also fail to frighten.

A) On 15.Nb5 there is 15...e4.

B) In the event of 15.Rd1 Black can pick one move from 15...Nd4, 15...Nf6 and 15...b6, with decent play everywhere.

C) 15.0-0 Nf8 16.Ne4 Be6 was about equal in Kovalenko, I (2645) – Neiksans, A (2557) chess.com 2020.

15...Na5 16.Be2 Nc6!



Position after: 16...Nc6!

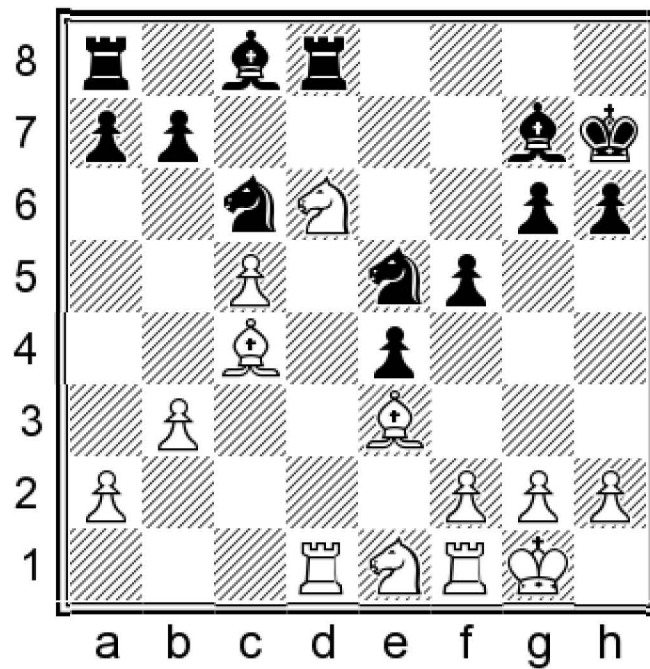
Now that the enemy bishop has been chased away from c4, Black is ready to throw in his f-pawn. The small practical drawback of the whole line is that White could now repeat, with 17.Bc4, but entering this slightly worse endgame if he wants to win would be a peculiar choice for Black anyway.

17.0-0

17.Nd6 f5,,

17...f5 18.Bc4+ Kh8 19.Nd6 Kh7 20.Bg5 Nf6 21.Be3 Nd7 22.Rcd1 e4 23.Ne1 Nde5=

Kornev's statement that Black has achieved rough equality is totally correct in my opinion.



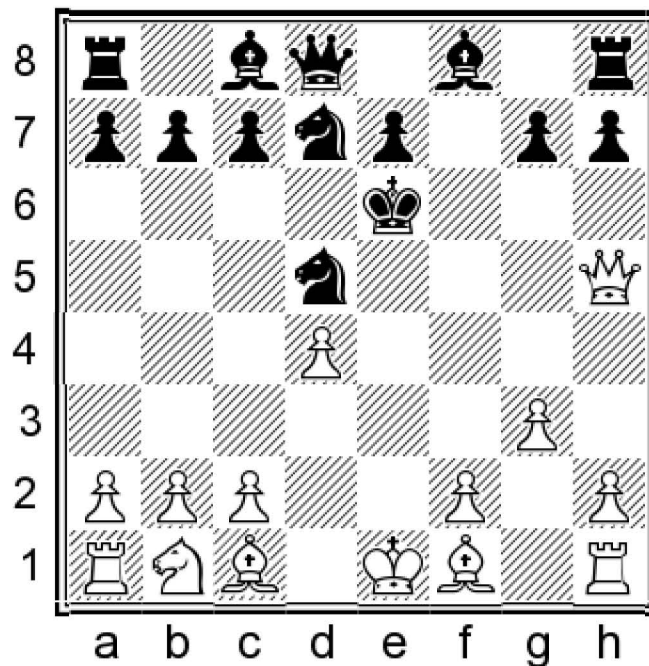
Position after: 23...Nde5=

h) 4.Nf3 dxe5 5.Nxe5 Nd7 6.Nxf7 Kxf7 7.Qh5+ Ke6 8.g3

1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.Nf3 dxe5 5.Nxe5 Nd7? 6.Nxf7!

In about 25 percent of the games White calmly retreats 6.Nf3 and bets on his space advantage. A valuable option too, albeit not a critical one.

6...Kxf7 7.Qh5+ Ke6 8.g3!?



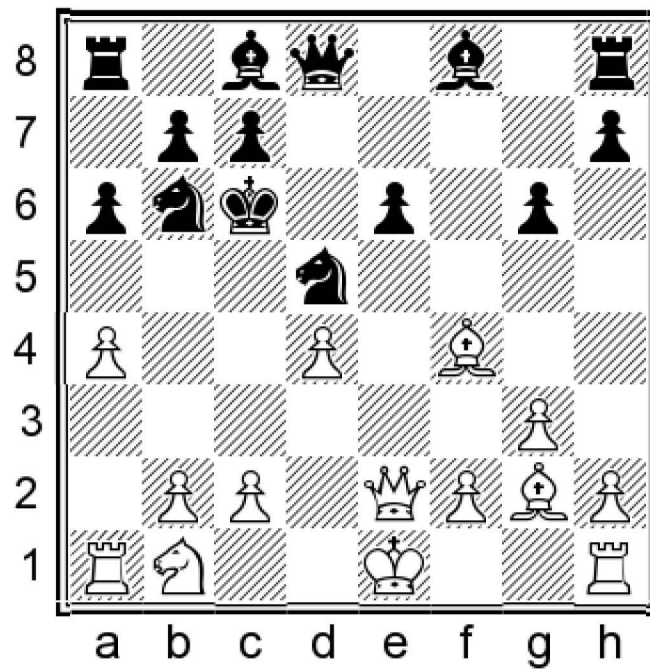
Position after: 8.g3!?

This is quite a decent alternative to 8.c4 (Chapter 8, subchapter c), in case White doesn't know the refutation of his opponent's fifth move or is afraid he might not remember it until the end. In most of the lines White will at least win a second pawn for the invested piece, while his opponent's king remains a permanent target in the middle of the board.

I will not annotate the following variations too much since we already have a refutation up our sleeve.

8...b5

A) 8...g6?! Not the best defensive attempt, if one is to believe the engine, since White should now get a large plus in all variations. 9.Bh3+ Kd6 10.Qe2 N7b6 [10...e5?! 11.c4+–] 11.Bf4+ Kc6 12.a4 a6 13.Bg2 e6

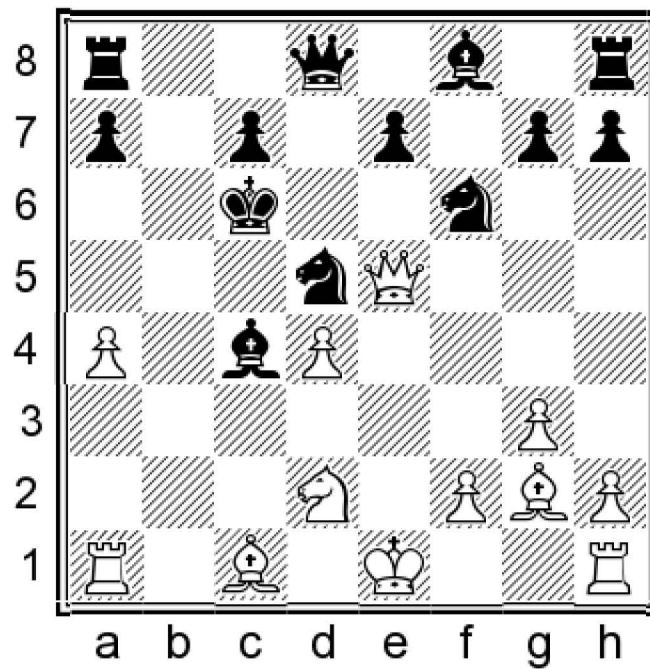


Position after: 13...e6

14.Be5 [Here or on the next move 14.a5 was interesting as well.] 14...Bd6
 15.Bxh8 Qxh8 16.c3 Kd7 17.a5 Nf4 18.gxf4 Nd5+– Berelowitsch, A
 (2484) – Neverov, V (2532) Cairo 1999.

B) 8...N7f6!? could perhaps limit the white advantage to something
 bearable: 9.Bh3+ Kd6 10.Qe5+ Kc6 11.Bg2.

B1) 11...b5?! tries to stop c2-c4 but only exposes the black king further.
12.a4! b4 13.c4 bxc3 14.bxc3 Ba6 We are following Fluvia Poyatos, J (2500) – Aloma Vidal, R (2388) La Massana 2008, where instead of 15.Nd2? White could have gained a decisive attack by means of the straightforward 15.c4! Bxc4 16.Nd2.

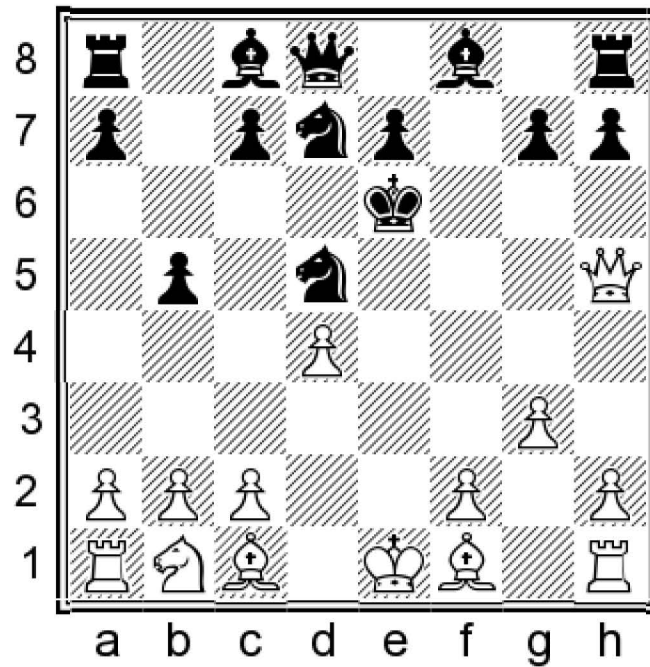


Position after: 16.Nd2

Now either 16...Ba6 17.Ba3 e6 18.Qxe6+ Bd6 19.Rc1+ or 16...Bd3 17.Ra3 Ba6 18.Rc3+ Kb7 19.Rb3+ Kc6 20.Ne4+—.

B2) 11...e6 12.c4 Now Black can choose between 12...Bd6 13.Qe2 [13.Qg5 is interesting too] and 12...Kb6 13.Nc3 a6 14.cxd5 exd5. White can now either grab the d5-pawn or satisfy himself with exploiting the dodgy placement of the enemy king. 15.0-0 c6 16.Bf4².

Let's return to 8...b5.

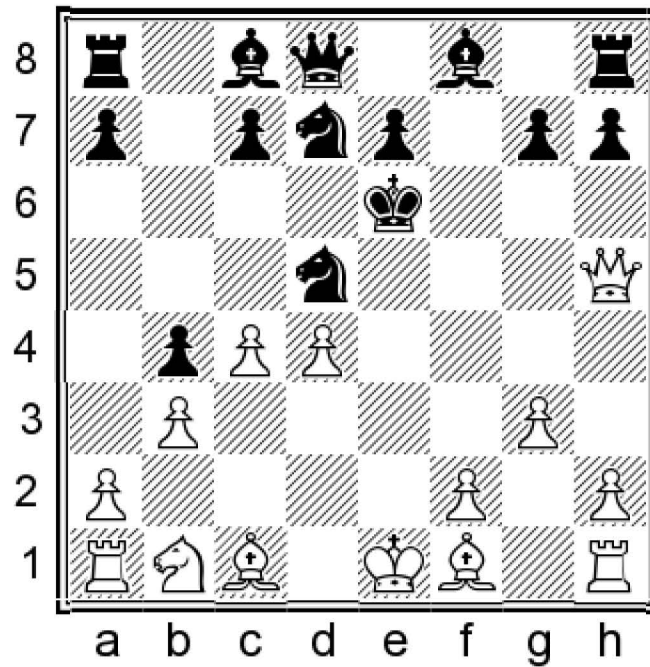


Position after: 8...b5

9.a4!

A) 9.Nc3? N7f6 10.Bh3+ Kd6 11.Qe5+ Kc6 12.Bg2 e6³ was Borocz, I (2430) – Miroshnichenko, E (2455) Budapest 1998. White still enjoys some compensation due to the enemy king's placement, but far less than after 9.a4.

B) 9.b3?! b4 [9...N7f6 10.Bh3+ Kd6 11.Qe5+ Kc6 12.Bg2 e6 13.c4 Kb7[∞]] 10.c4 [10.a3!?!]

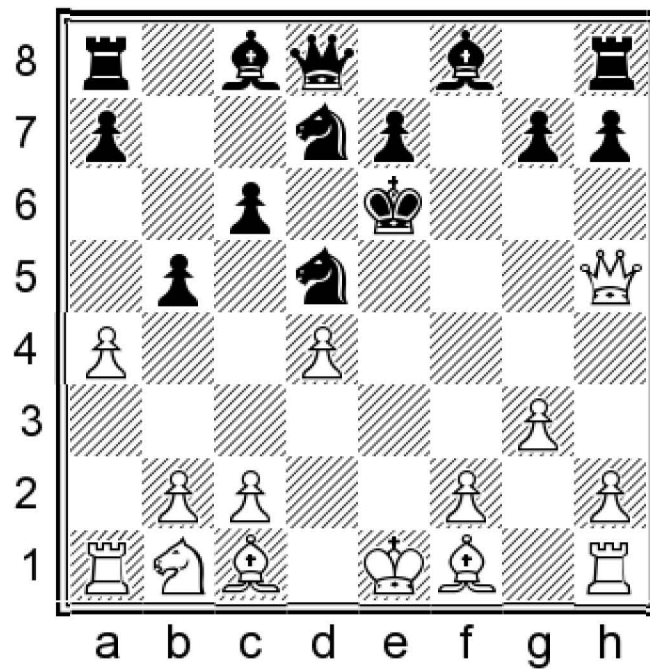


Position after: 10.c4

10...bxc3 [10...N5f6? allows mate in nine! 11.Bh3+ Kd6 12.c5+ Kc6 13.Bg2+ Kb5 14.Qe2+ 1-0 Nehlert, P – Menge, M Baden 1992.] 11.Ba3 N7b6 12.Bg2 c6 This is murky whereas 11.Nxc3?! N7f6 12.Bh3+ Kd6 13.Bf4+ Kc6 14.Qe2 a6 is a bit better for Black according to the machine.

9...c6

9...b4?! 10.c4 bxc3 11.bxc3± The freshly opened b-file and the option of Ba3 will likely prove useful to feed White's attack.

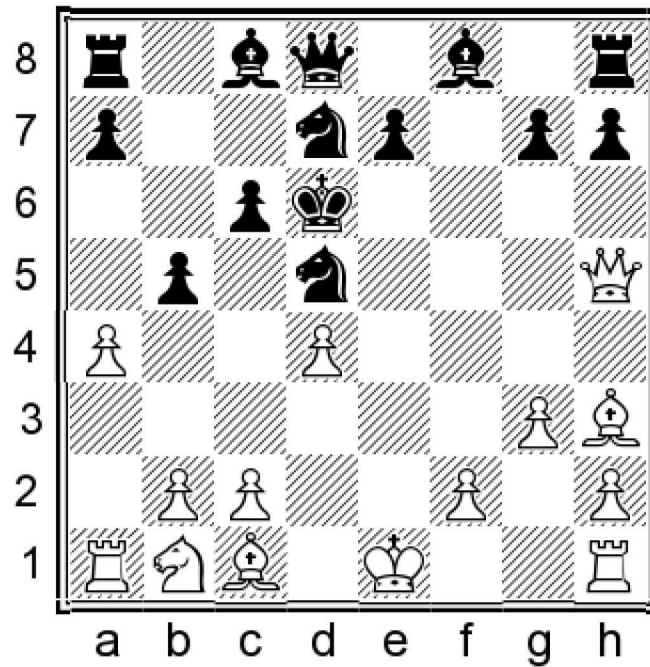


Position after: 9...c6

10.axb5

A) 10.Nc3?? g6 11.Bh3+ Kf7 12.Qf3+ N7f6 13.Bxc8 Rxc8 14.axb5 cxb5 15.Rxa7 Nxc3 16.bxc3 Qd5 0-1 Navara, D (2602) – Miroshnichenko, E (2599) Antalya 2004.

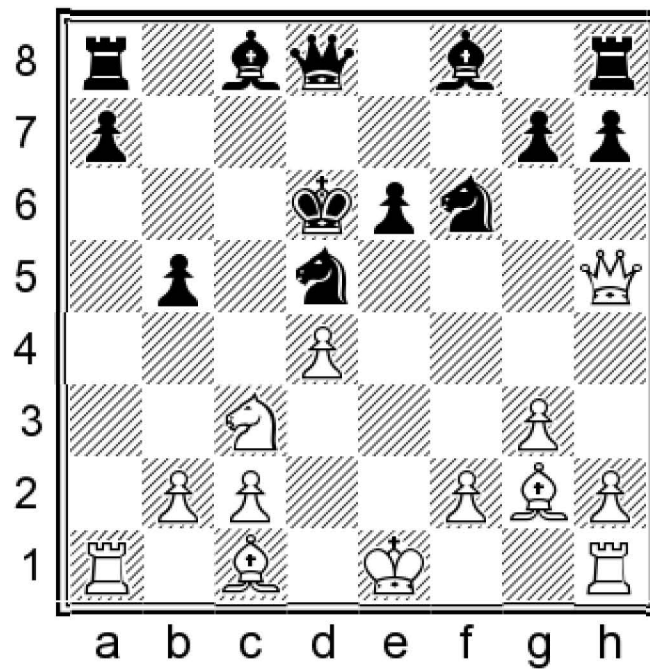
B) 10.Bh3+ deserves attention. 10...Kd6



Position after: 10...Kd6

B1) 11.Nc3?! b4 12.Bf4+! [12.Nxd5?! cxd5∞ Yemelin, V (2485) – Popov, V (2505) St Petersburg 1998] 12...Nxf4 13.Ne4+ Kc7 14.Qa5+! Nb6 15.Qe5+ Qd6 [15...Kb7?? 16.Nc5#] 16.Nxd6 exd6 17.Qxf4 Bxh3 18.Qf7+ Bd7 19.0-0∞ Balinov, I (2482) – Posch, W (2282) Oberwart 2001.

B2) 11.axb5! cxb5 [11...e6?! 12.c4± Jakubiec, A (2541) – Pitschka, C (2305) Pardubice 2007; White won 11 moves later] 12.Bg2 e6 13.Nc3 N7f6

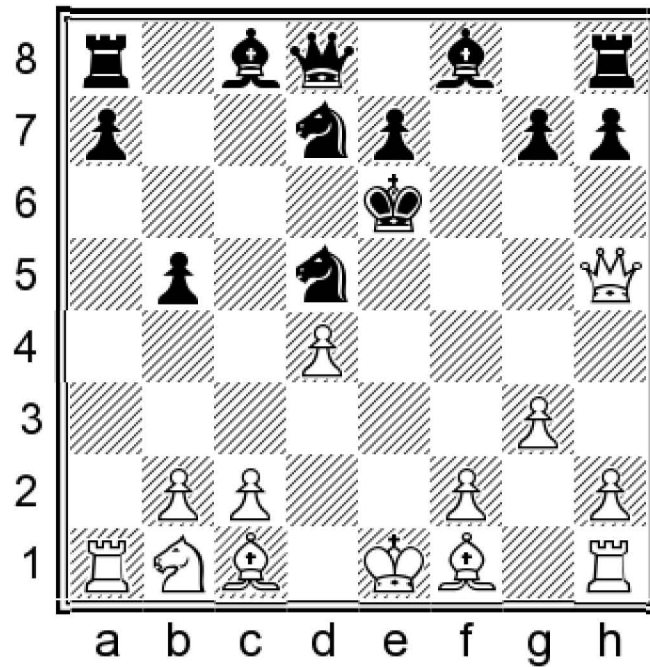


Position after: 13...N7f6

14.Nxb5+ [14.Qe2!?] 14...Kd7 15.Qe2 Qb6 16.c4 Ba6 17.0-0 Bxb5
 18.cxb5 a5 19.bxa6 Be7 Black is just in time to protect the e6-pawn in
 case of 20.Bh3 followed by Re1. He might hold but his position doesn't
 look like too much fun.

10...g6

10...cxb5



Position after: 10...cxb5

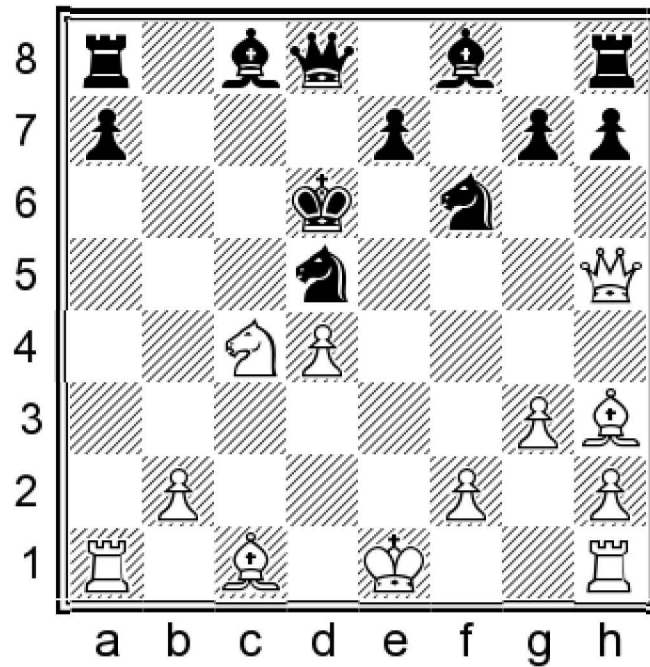
A) 11.Bg2?! N7f6 12.Qe2+ Kf7 13.Qxb5∞ Tiits, T (2465) – Liardet, F (2255) ICCF corr 1992.

B) 11.Nc3 N7f6 12.Bh3+ Kd6 13.Qe5+ Kc6 14.Bg2 e6 15.0-0

B1) 15...Bd6?! 16.Qe2 Qb6 17.Bg5 Rb8 At this point 18.Nxb5! Qxb5 19.c4 gives White a dangerous initiative and is more promising than 18.Bxf6 gxf6 19.Qf3? Odendahl, R (2370) – Essing, A (2320) Germany 1995.

B2) After 15...a6 I don't see an immediate blow but White of course keeps his usual lasting compensation.

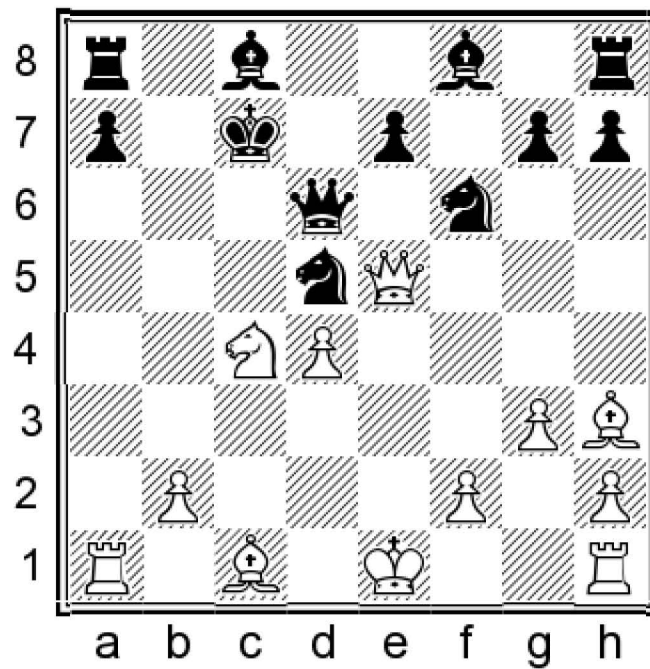
C) 11.c4! bxc4 12.Na3 N7f6 13.Bh3+ Kd6 14.Nxc4+



Position after: 14.Nxc4+

C1) 14...Kc6 15.Qe2 Bxh3 16.Ne5+ Kb7 17.Qa6+ Kc7 [17...Kb8 18.Nc6+ Kc7 19.Nxd8 Kxd8 20.Qb7 Rc8 21.Bg5 Black is getting crushed.] 18.Bf4! Qe8 19.Rc1+ Kd8 20.Qb7 Rc8 21.Rxc8+ Bxc8 22.Nc6+ Qxc6 23.Qxc6± We have another version of the same material imbalance, three minor pieces against a queen and pawn.

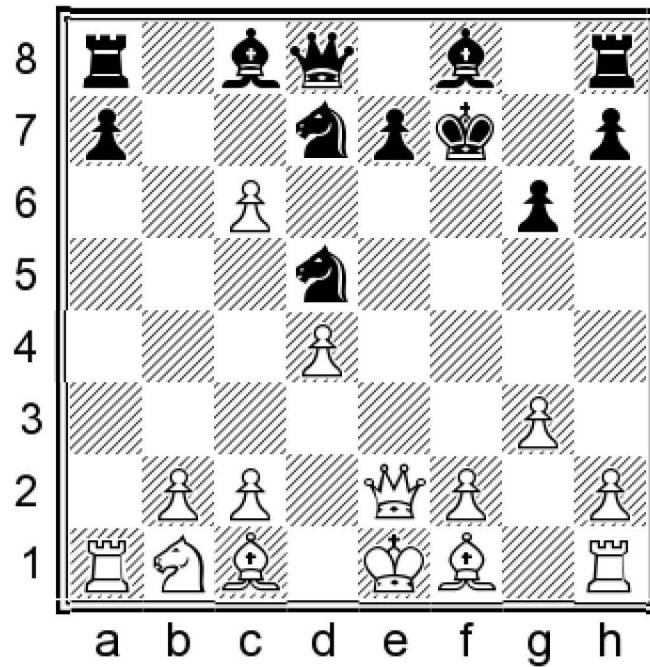
C2) 14...Kc7 15.Qe5+ Qd6



Position after: 15...Qd6

And here 16.Bg2! Qxe5+ 17.dxe5 wins back the piece with a risk-free initiative for White, while 16.Nxd6 exd6 17.Qe2 Bxh3 is very good for White according to the computer but I am not so sure.

11.Qe2+ Kf7 12.bxc6



Position after: 12.bxc6

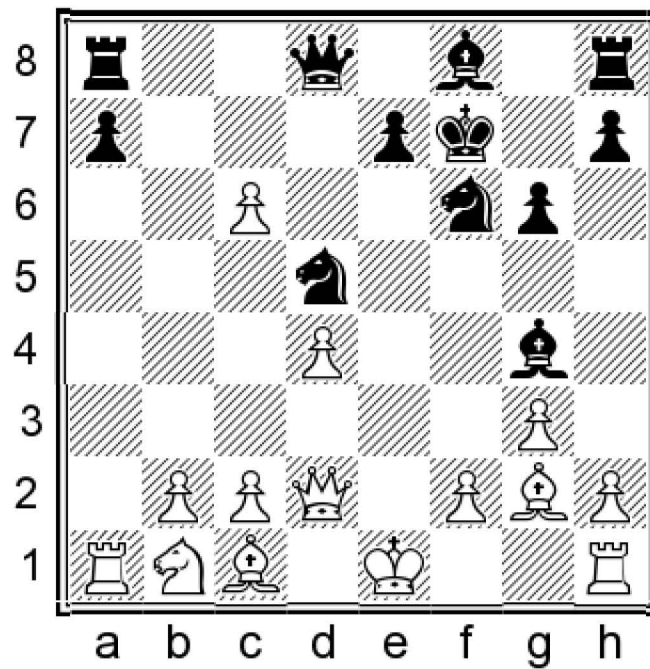
12...N7f6

12...N7b6 13.Bg2 Nf6 14.c3 Bg7 15.Nd2± Ernst, T – Komarov, D Dortmund 1992. White retains three sound pawns for the piece while his opponent barely manages to defend his weaknesses, unable to create any threat himself.

13.Bg2

13.c3 Bg4 14.f3 This idea is interesting too.

13...Bg4 14.Qd2²



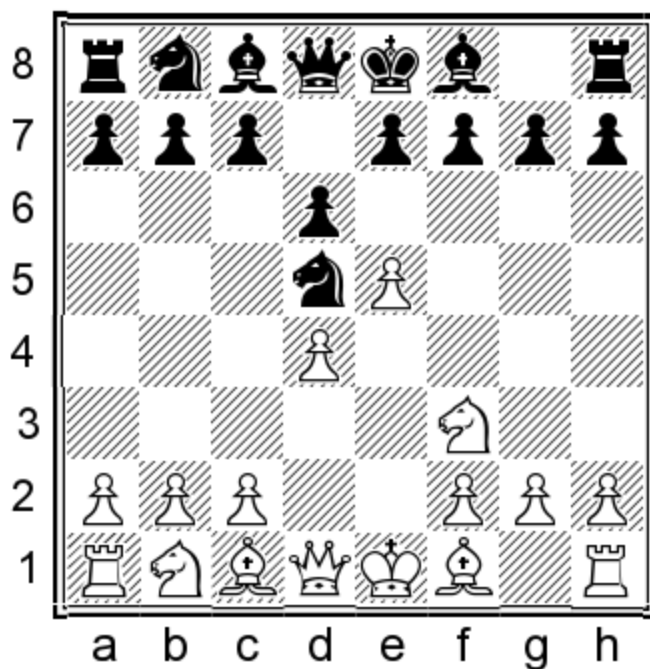
Position after: 14.Qd2²

Sivokho, S (2503) – Abrashkin, B (2391) St Petersburg 2002. The situation is similar to the main variation 12...N7b6 and the final note to 15.Nd2.

Conclusion: While 8...b5 requires some knowledge (and even though it isn't entirely clear), the jump 8...N7f6 appears to be best. White then wins back the piece without effort and while Black is far from dead, who would be willing to play that on a regular basis?

i) 4.Nf3 -- (according to Negi) Once I was finished with writing my book I could check what Negi says in his recent work *1.e4 Minor Lines*. I spare you the details of the chronological process of why I didn't come to read the Indian GM's prose earlier... At any rate I decided to include a few of his variations and add my personal touch to them in the last chapter, and not in the respective chapters of each line. I didn't change anything in the 1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.Nf3 dxe5 sections, nor did I check carefully Negi's work there, as I do cover those lines extensively.

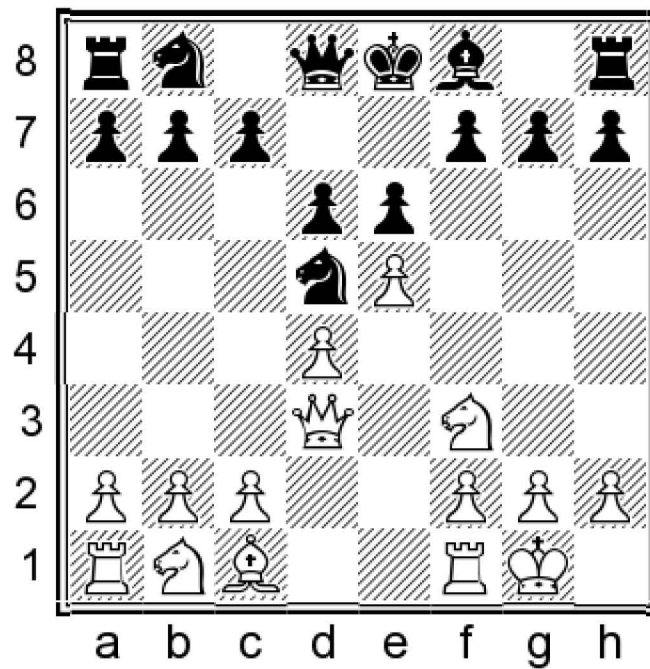
1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.Nf3



Position after: 4.Nf3

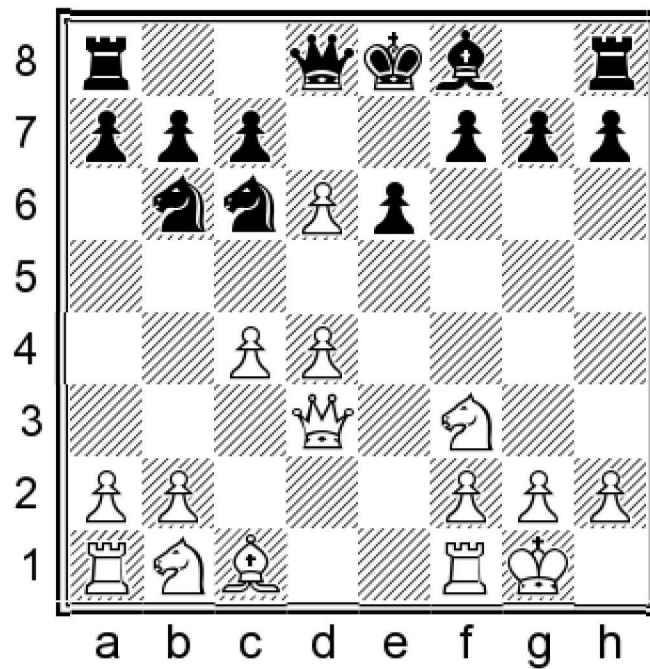
4...Nb6!?

A) 4...Bf5 5.Bd3! Bxd3 6.Qxd3 e6 [The move order 6...Nc6 may transpose but, as Negi points out, it allows the extra option of 7.e6!?.] 7.0-0



Position after: 7.0-0

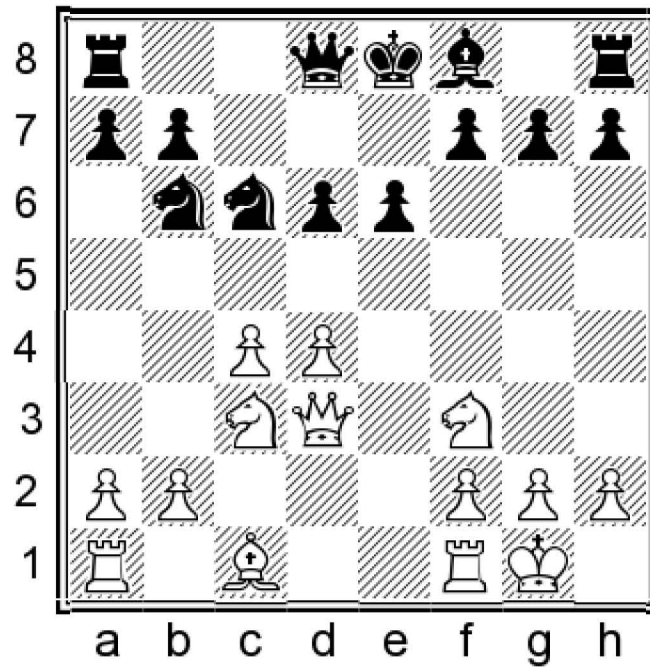
7...Nc6 [Negi doesn't consider 7...dxe5, which may be at least as good.]
 8.c4 Nb6 For some reason this reply, Black's most frequent (well, 12 games out of a total of 19), escaped my attention [for 8...Nde7 see the relevant section]. 9.exd6



Position after: 9.exd6

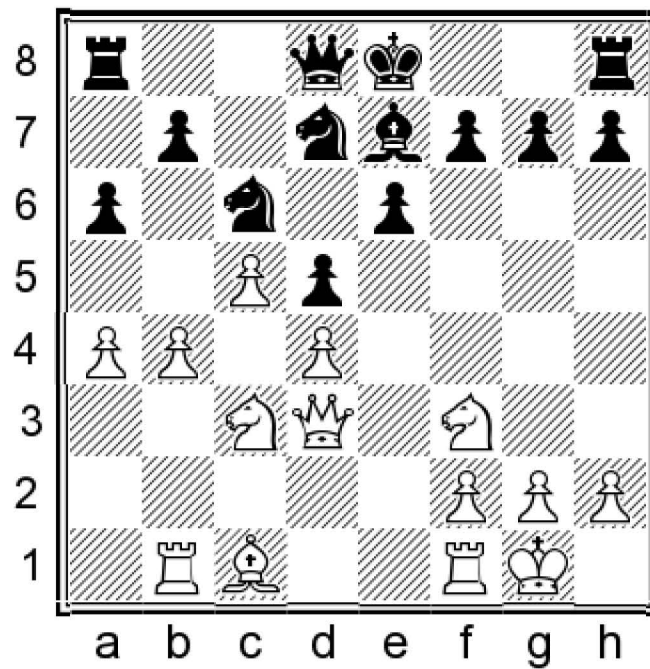
A1) 9...Bxd6 10.Nc3± [But not 10.c5? Bxc5µ as the d-pawn is pinned.]
 White can develop smoothly whereas Black is somewhat cramped with no obvious follow-up. After 10.Nc3 Black can't castle at once in view of the disastrous 10...0-0 11.Ng5 g6 12.Qh3 h5 13.c5+–.

A2) 9...cxd6 10.Nc3



Position after: 10.Nc3

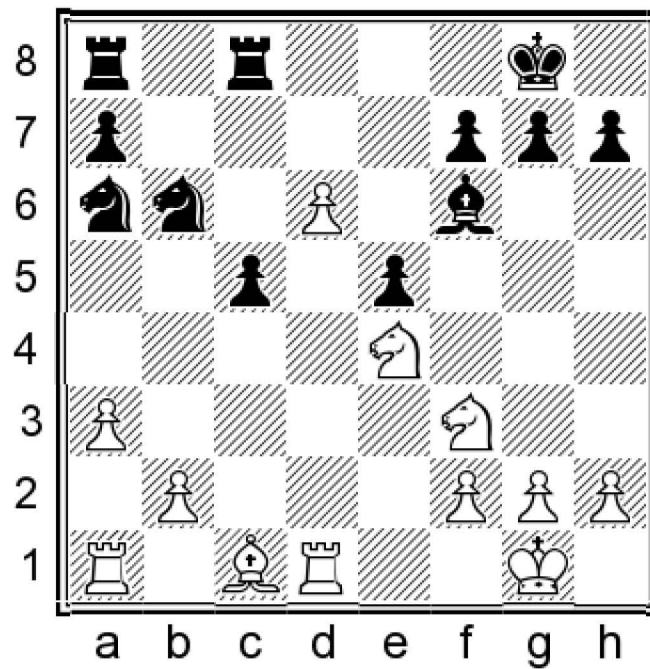
A2.1) I looked at 10...d5 in order to avoid what follows. It turns out that Black lands in another kind of clearly worse position, which I would however prefer to defend rather than the one arising after 10...Be7.
 11.c5 Nd7 12.b4 a6 13.Rb1 Be7 14.a4



Position after: 14.a4

White enjoys a risk-free initiative after either 14...a5 15.b5 Nb4 16.Qe2 or 14...0-0 15.b5 axb5 16.axb5 Na5 17.Bf4±.

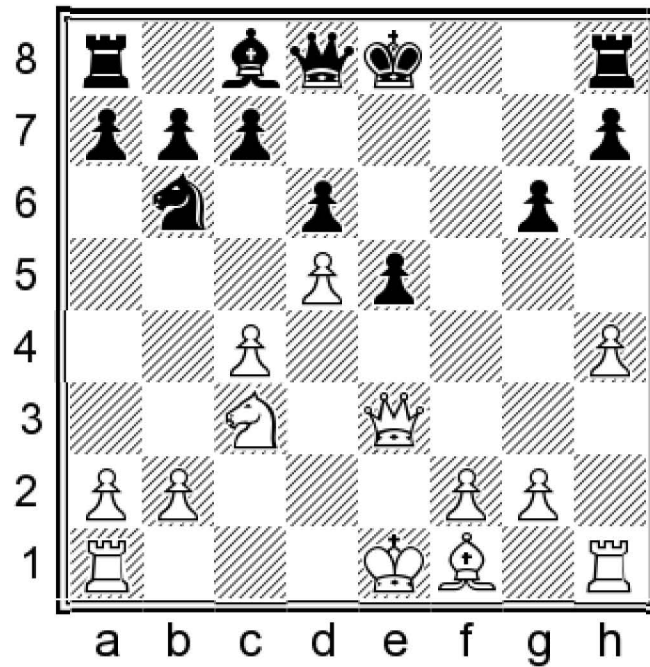
A2.2) 10...Be7 11.d5!N Nb4 12.Qe4 e5 13.c5! dxc5 14.a3 Na6 15.Rd1 0-0 16.d6 Bf6 17.Qxb7 Qc8 18.Qxc8 Rfxc8 19.Ne4±



Position after: 19.Ne4±

Everything that Negi says about 4...Bf5 is sensible but I find a bit strange to credit that move with a “!?” mark if the final verdict is “much better for White” after best play by Black.

B) 4...Nc6 5.c4 Nb6 6.e6 fxe6 7.Nc3 g6 A more combative but also riskier option than 7...e5. 8.h4 Bg7 9.Be3 e5 10.d5 Nd4 11.Nxd4 exd4 12.Bxd4 Bxd4 13.Qxd4 e5 14.Qe3



Position after: 14.Qe3

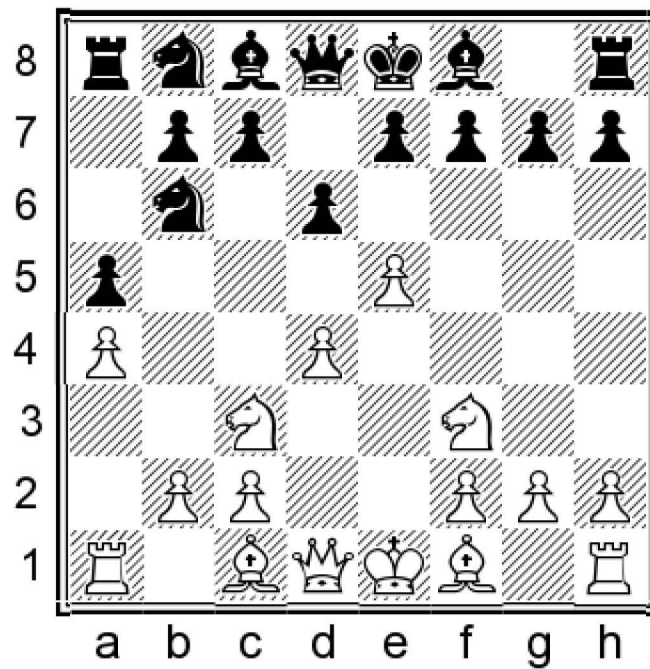
No revolution this time in *1.e4 Minor Defences* as Negi offers some refinements but no “bomb”. Since I also cover this line exhaustively, here you have just a summary of his suggestions.

B1) 14...Qe7 15.Be2²

B2) 14...Bf5 15.Be2 [Rather than “my” 15.h5 Qf6².] 15...Qf6 16.g4 Bd7 17.Ne4²

B3) 14...0-0 15.0-0-0 Qf6 16.f3 Qf4 17.Qxf4 Rxf4 18.b3²

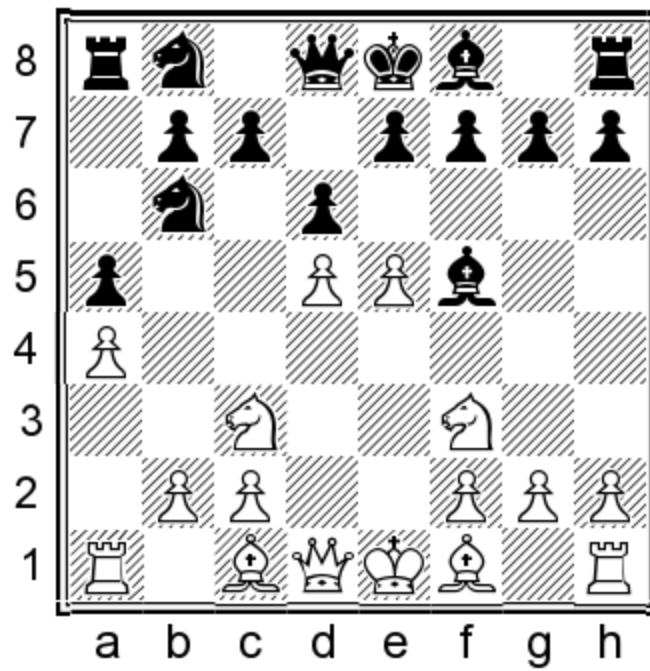
5.a4 a5 6.Nc3



Position after: 6.Nc3

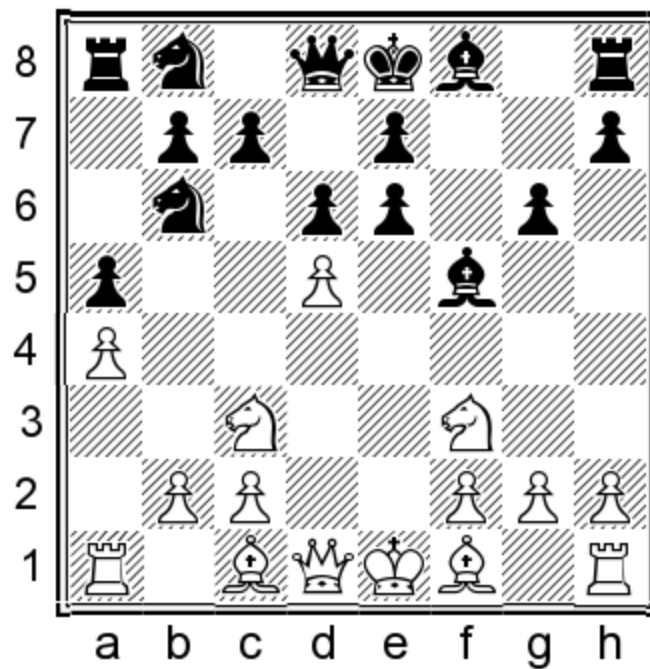
6...g6

6...Bf5 7.d5!N [Negi thinks that White's advantage is more likely to vanish after 7.Bd3 Bxd3 8.Qxd3 e6 and he may be correct, although it's more a matter of taste.]



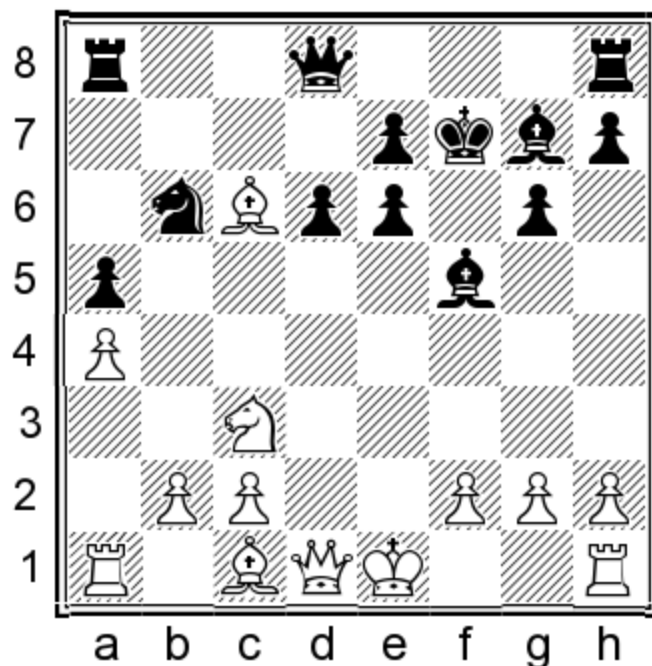
Position after: 7.d5!N

A) 7...g6?! 8.e6! [The alternative 8.exd6!, not mentioned, is equally strong, notably because Nd4 or Qd4 could follow.] 8...fxe6



Position after: 8...fxe6

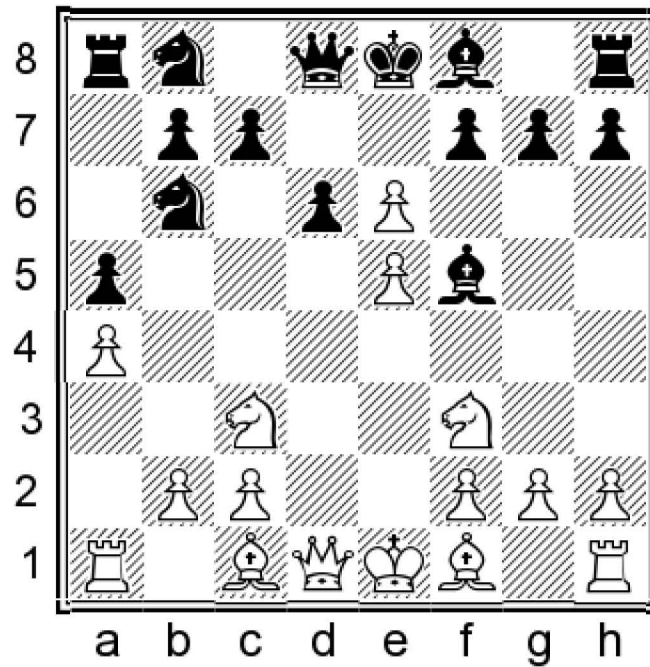
9.Nd4± [I find 9.Nh4! with the idea of 9...Bg7 10.g4 clearly more convincing.] 9...Bg7 Now 10.g4 runs into 10...Bxd4! 11.Qxd4 e5, so that White should go for 10.Bb5+ c6 11.dxc6 Nxc6 12.Nxc6 bxc6 13.Bxc6+ Kf7 which seems, however, a lot more complex than 9.Nh4!.



Position after: 13...Kf7

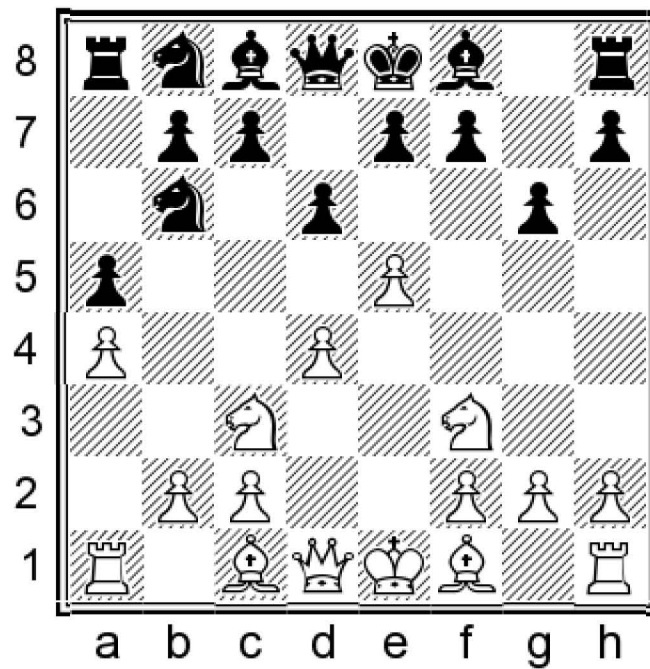
At this stage the critical continuation consists of 14.g4 Bxc3+ 15.bxc3 Qc8 16.Bxa8 [16.Qf3?! Nc4! is already balanced according to the engine!] 16...Qxa8 17.0-0 Be4. White stands better but Black has positional trumps for the lost exchange. In a practical game all results are still possible.

B) 7...e6 8.dxe6



Position after: 8.dxe6

8...Bxe6 [8...fxe6 9.Bg5 I'm not sure if this is best. At any rate, following 9...Be7 10.Bxe7 Qxe7 11.exd6 cxd6 12.Qd2 White may well have the sounder pawn structure, as Negi states, but Black is still very much in the game.] 9.Bg5 Qd7 10.exd6 Bxd6 11.Nb5 Nd5 12.Nxd6+ Qxd6 13.c4 Nb4 14.Qxd6 cxd6 15.0-0-0²



Position after: 6...g6

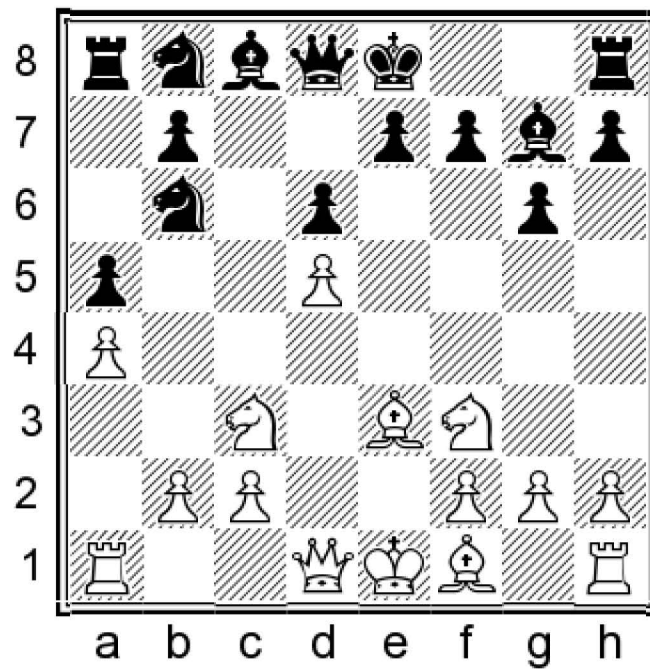
7.exd6! cxd6

Negi omits the recapture 7...Qxd6, which isn't necessarily inferior.

8.d5!N

The “!” is Negi's, but this time I doubt his recommendation is stronger than the usual 8.Bb5+.

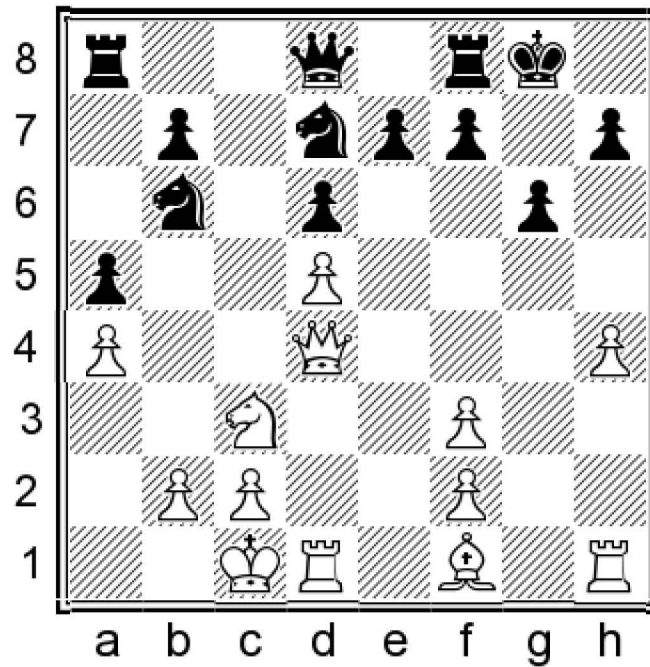
8...Bg7 9.Be3



Position after: 9.Be3

9...0-0

A) 9...Bg4?! could be smart if White's initiative were not so strong after 10.Bd4 Bxf3 11.gxf3. Now 11...Bf6² may be the most tenacious, since after 11...0-0 12.Bxg7 Kxg7 13.Qd4+ Kg8 14.0-0-0 N8d7 15.h4 the attack is venomous.

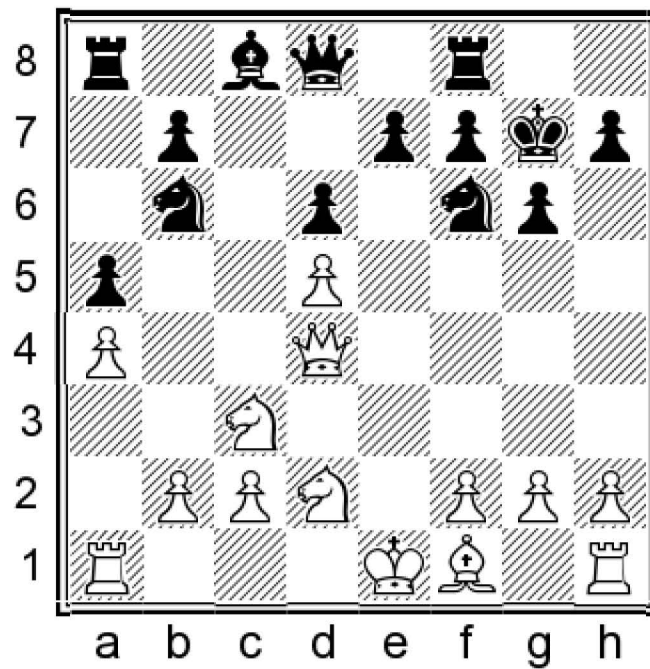


Position after: 15.h4

For instance, 15...Nf6 16.h5! Nxh5 17.Rxh5 gxh5 18.Bh3 f6 19.Be6+ Kh8 20.Rh1±.

B) 9...N8d7!? avoids the exchange of the dark-squared bishops but I'm quite skeptical about Negi's proposal. 10.Bd4 Nf6 11.Bb5+ Bd7² You may compare this with what I advise in the relevant section.

10.Bd4 N8d7 11.Bxg7 Kxg7 12.Qd4+ Nf6 13.Nd2!



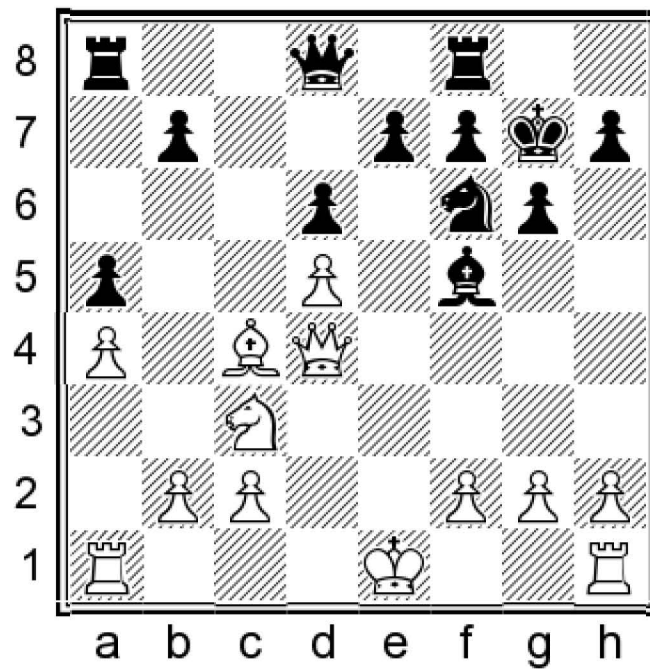
Position after: 13.Nd2!

The exclamation mark is again Negi's, based on the follow-up 13...Bd7 14.Nde4 Rc8 15.h4 h5 16.f3. Fair enough but I can't see anything wrong with moving that bishop further.

13...Bf5

Black now has the potential trick of ...Nxd5! Nxd5 ...e5.

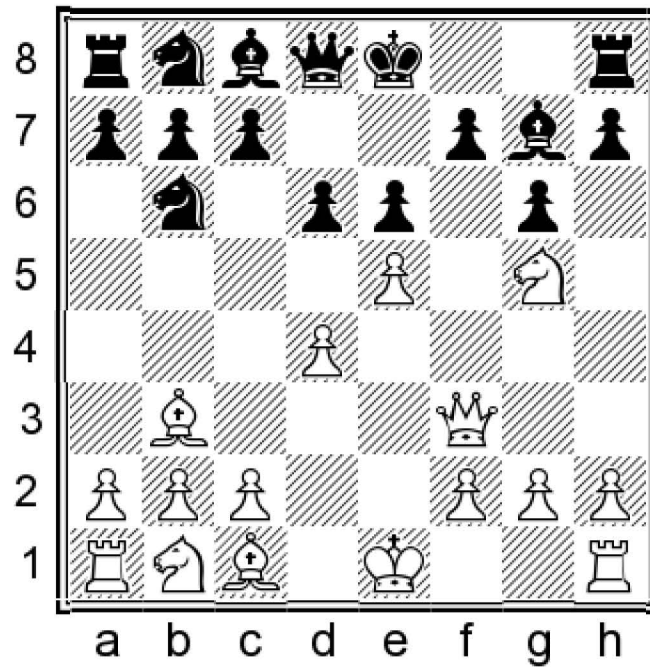
14.Nc4 Nxc4 15.Bxc4



Position after: 15.Bxc4

The computer gives White's last two moves as White's most promising option, but this is ² at best.

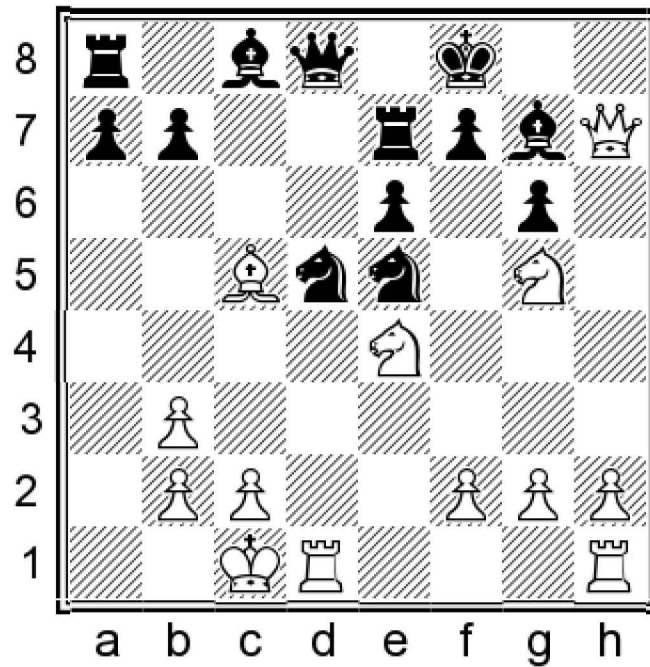
**j) 4.Nf3 g6 5.Bc4 Nb6 6.Bb3 Bg7 7.Ng5 e5 8.Qf3 (according to Negi)
1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.Nf3 g6 5.Bc4 Nb6 6.Bb3 Bg7 7.Ng5 e5
8.Qf3**



Position after: 8.Qf3

8...Qe7

8...0-0!? 9.Qh3 h6 10.Nf3 dxe5 11.dxe5 c5 12.Bxh6 c4 13.Be3! cxb3N
 Negi's novelty sign, but it will come to the same as the 13...N8d7 variation.
 14.Ng5 Re8 15.Nc3 N8d7 16.Qh7+ Kf8 17.Nce4 Nxe5 18.Bc5+ Re7
 19.axb3 Nd5 20.0-0-0 Negi stops here with the verdict "clearly better" for
 White.



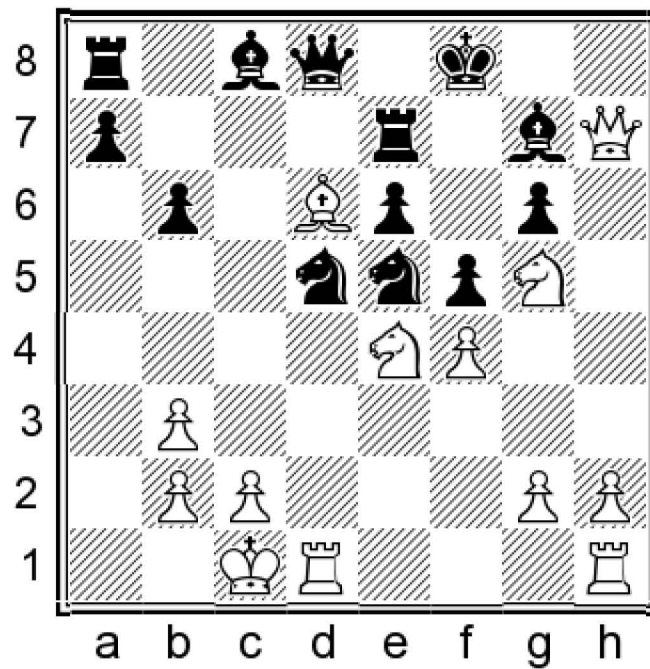
Position after: 20.0-0-0

I let the engine run longer than I did prior to reading his suggestion and came to the same conclusion, although in a practical game the position remains very messy. Here are some sample lines.

A) 20...Bd7 21.h4! [21.f4 Ng4 22.Nxf7 looks good too.] 21...Qe8 22.h5 gxh5 23.c4 [23.Nd6!?] 23...f6 [Or 23...Rc8 24.Ba3.] 24.f4±

B) 20...Nd7 21.Ba3 b6 [21...b5 runs into 22.Nxf7! Kxf7 23.Ng5+ Kf6 24.Rhe1±] 22.c4 Nc5 23.Kb1 Bb7 24.h4±

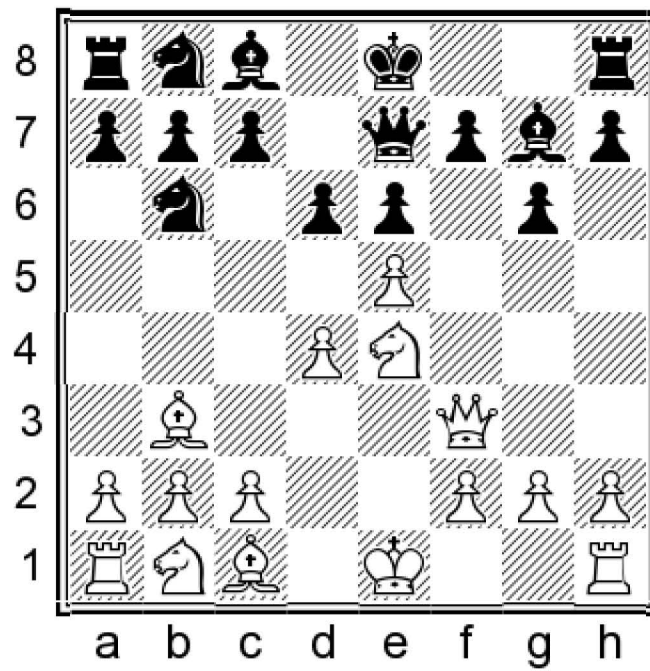
C) 20...b6 21.Bd6 f5 [21...Ng4 22.Qh4 f5 23.Ba3±] 22.f4



Position after: 22.f4

22...Nd3+ [if 22...Ng4 then 23.Rxd5 exd5 24.Qxg6 is lethal] 23.Rxd3! fxe4 24.Rxd5 exd5 25.Qxg6 Kg8 26.Ba3+– The rook can't move because of Qh7 mate and White will just continue f5-f6.

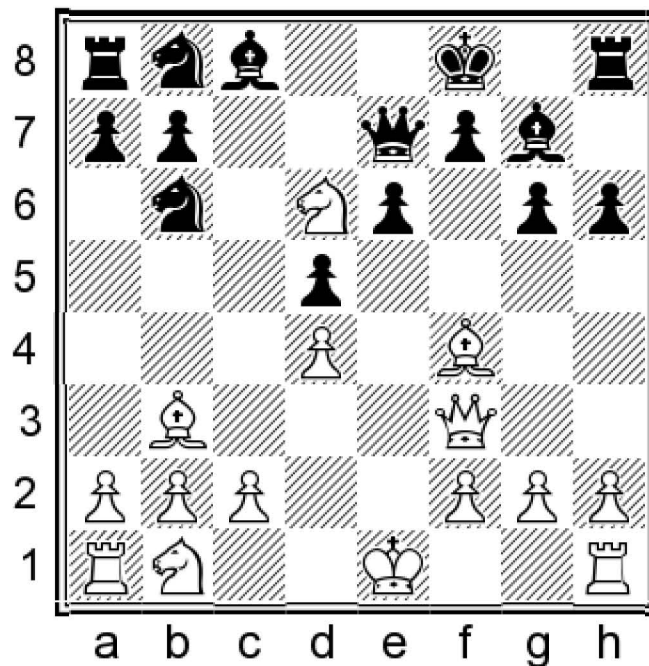
9.Ne4



Position after: 9.Ne4

9...dxe5

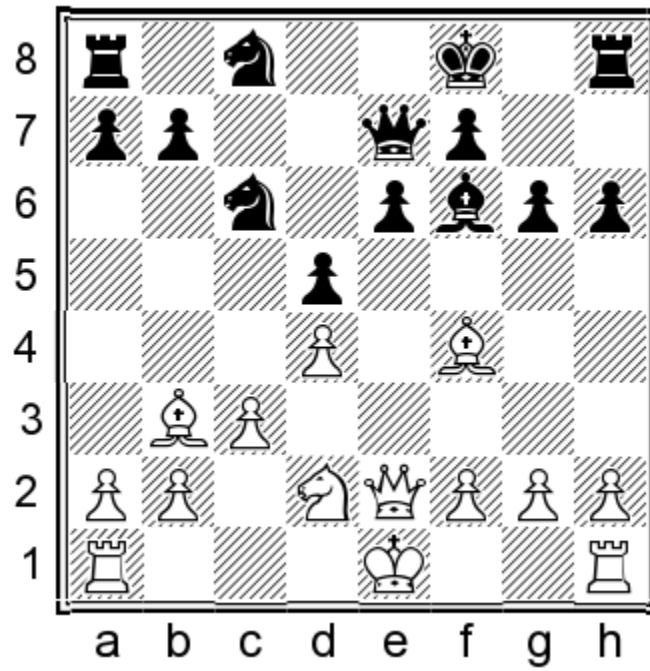
9...h6!? 10.exd6! [10.Be3!?N Negi] 10...cxd6 11.Bf4 d5 12.Nd6+ Kf8



Position after: 12...Kf8

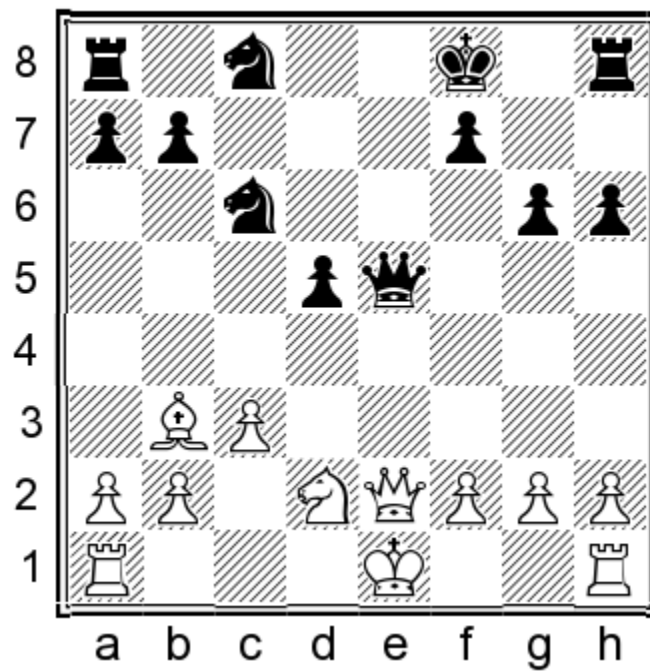
A) 13.c3 Nc6 14.0-0?! g5 15.Nxc8 Nxc8 Roesch M, H (2410) – Pavlov, V (2415) ICCF email 2018. 16.Be3 f5 This is unclear according to Negi, and I do agree. Following 17.Nd2 Bf6 18.g3 Nd6 it is neither easy to attack Black's weakness on e6 nor to bother his king, so I tried 18.c4 but Black seems to hold after the sequence 18...f4 19.cxd5 exd5 20.Bxd5 fxe3 21.fxe3 Kg7 22.Ne4 Rf8 23.Qg3=.

B) 13.Nxc8 Forcing the recapture with the knight. 13...Nxc8 14.c3 Nc6 15.Nd2!N Delaying kingside castling is Negi's point, to dissuade Black from a pawn-storm on the kingside. 15...Bf6 [15...g5?! 16.Be3 followed by 0-0-0.] 16.Qe2!



Position after: 16.Qe2!

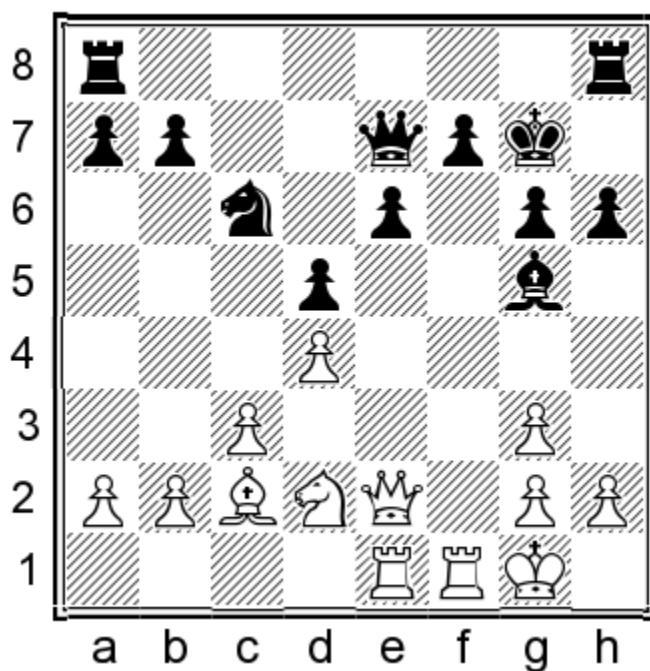
B1) Black may try to force matters and hold an inferior ending by means of 16...e5 17.dxe5 Bxe5 18.Bxe5 Qxe5.



Position after: 18...Qxe5

19.Nf3 [19.Qxe5 Nxe5 20.Bxd5 Nd3+ 21.Kf1 Nb6 22.Bxb7 Rb8 23.Ba6 Nxb2 Black has gained enough compensation for his missing pawn.]
19...Qxe2+ 20.Kxe2 Nb6 21.Rhd1 Rd8 22.Rd2 Kg7 23.Rad1 Rhe8+
24.Kf1 Nc4²

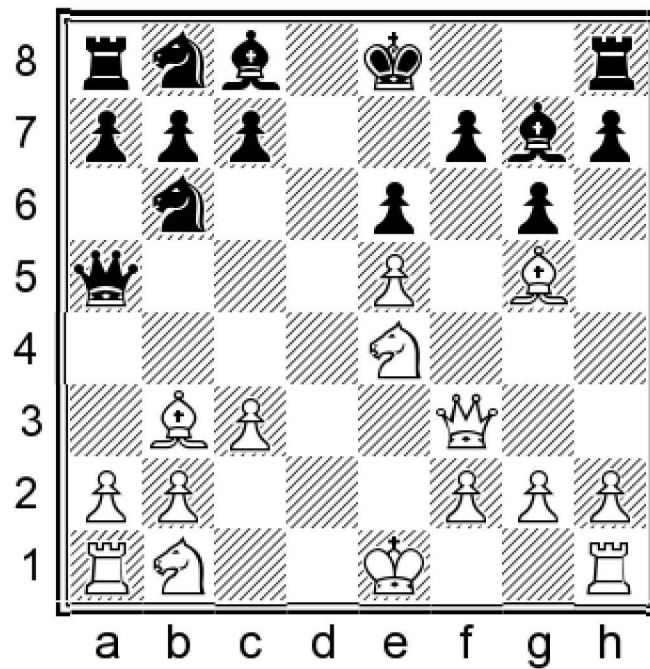
B2) 16...Kg7 17.0-0 Bg5 18.Bg3 Nd6 19.Bc2 Nf5 20.Rae1 Nxe3
21.fxg3²



Position after: 21.fxf3²

Negi estimates that White stands slightly better. He is probably right.

10.Bg5 Qb4+ 11.c3 Qa5 12.dxe5!N



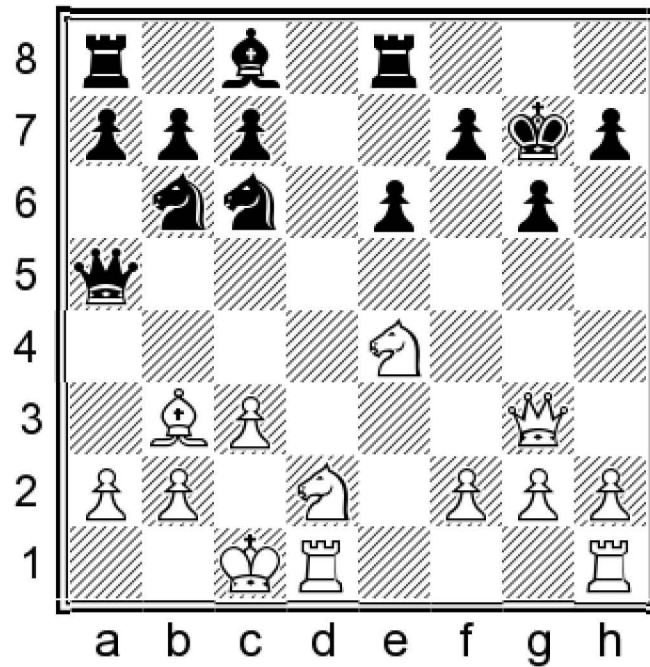
Position after: 12.dxe5!N

Neg.

12...N8d7

A) 12...Qxe5 13.Bf4² followed by 14.Bxc7.

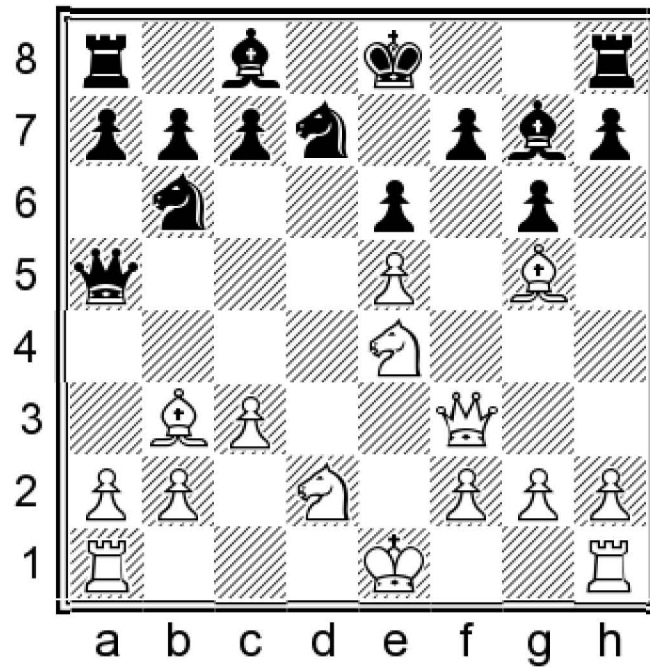
B) 12...0-0 13.Be7 Re8 14.Bf6 N8d7 15.Nbd2 Nxe5 16.Qg3 Nc6 17.Bxg7 Kxg7 18.0-0-0



Position after: 18.0-0-0

Here too White has ample compensation for his meagre material deficit. I attempted to force events by 18...f5 19.Ng5 h6. This, however, fails to achieve the desired result because of 20.h4!; the knight is taboo and after the sensible 20...Qe5 21.f4 Qf6 White decisively opens lines with 22.h5! hxc5 23.hxc6 Kxc6 24.Rh2±.

13.Nbd2



Position after: 13.Nbd2

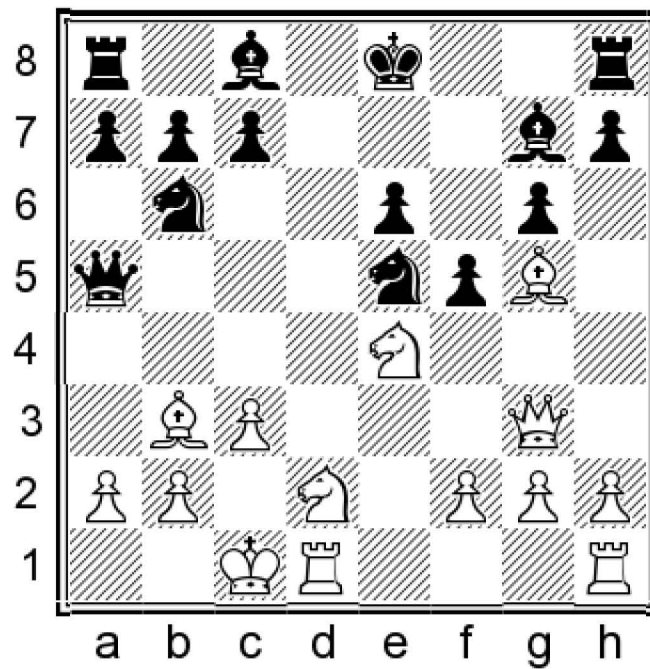
13...Nxe5

13...h6 14.Bf6 0-0 15.0-0-0 Nxe5 16.Qg3 Negi says this “looks promising for White”. It certainly does!

14.Qg3 f5

14...h6 15.Bf6 is similar to 13...h6.

15.0-0-0!

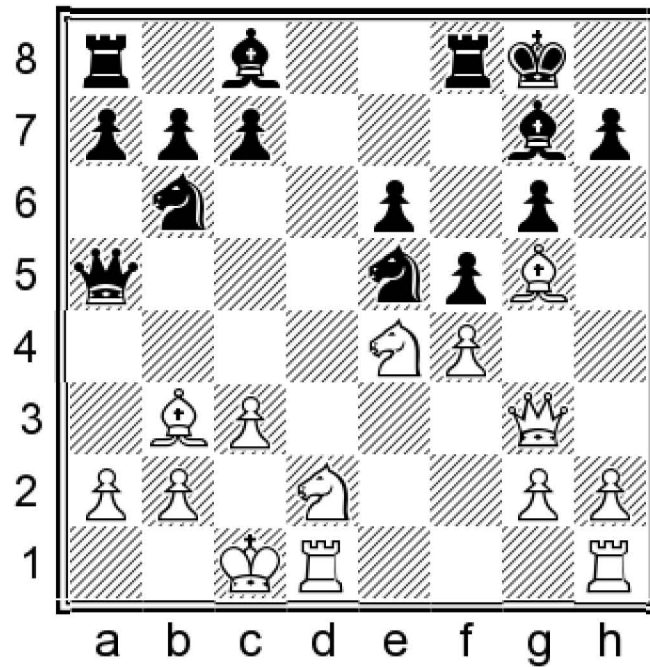


Position after: 15.0-0-0!

15...0-0

15...fxe4? loses on the spot to 16.Nc4!+–, while 15...Nd5?! 16.f4! [but not 16.Bh6 Nxc3! 17.Nxc3 Bxh6∞] also leads to problems for Black following 16...Nf7 17.Bxd5 exd5 18.Nf6+ Bxf6 19.Bxf6 0-0 20.h4 Qb6 21.Be7 Re8 22.Rde1 with a large edge to White.

16.f4



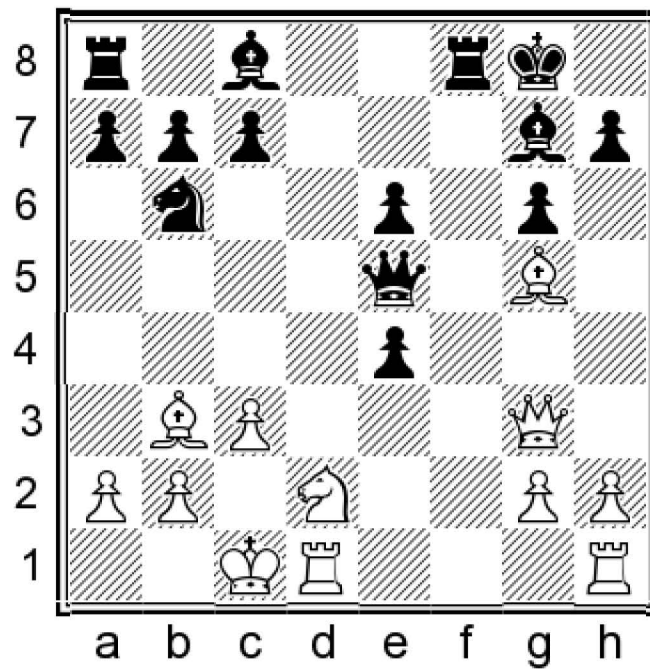
Position after: 16.f4

16...fxe4!

Black's best.

After a knight retreat White would be quick on the kingside, for instance 16...Nc6?! 17.Nf2 Nd5 18.Kb1 or 16...Ned7 17.Nf2, and now 17...Nc5 18.h4!, or 17...Nf6 18.Bxf6! Rxf6 19.h4 Bd7 20.Nd3!?, or finally 17...Nd5 18.h4 N7f6 19.h5 Nxh5 20.Rxh5! gxh5 21.Bh6 Rf7 22.Nd3± and you may check that White's positional trumps outweigh his material deficit.

17.fxe5 Qxe5



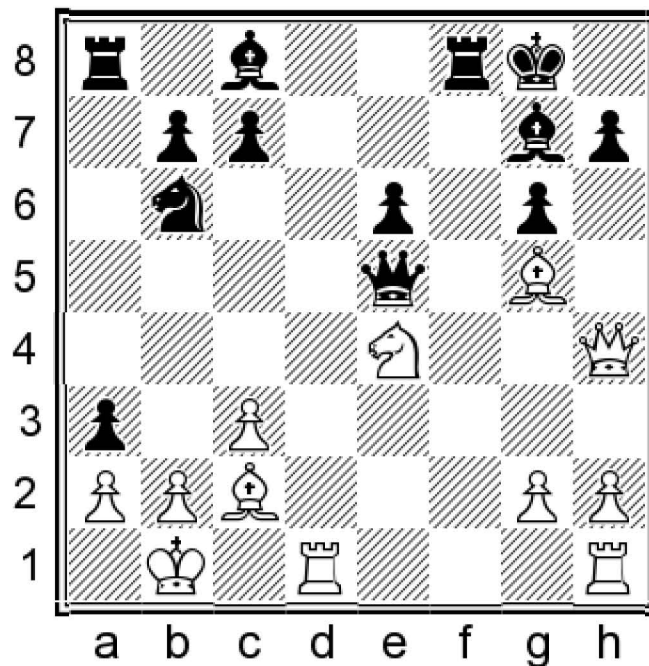
Position after: 17...Qxe5

18.Qh4

18.Qxe5 Bxe5 19.Nxe4© White's compensation is sufficient but the most likely outcome is a draw.

18...a5! 19.a4

Negi also studies 19.Nxe4 a4 20.Bc2 a3 21.Kb1!.

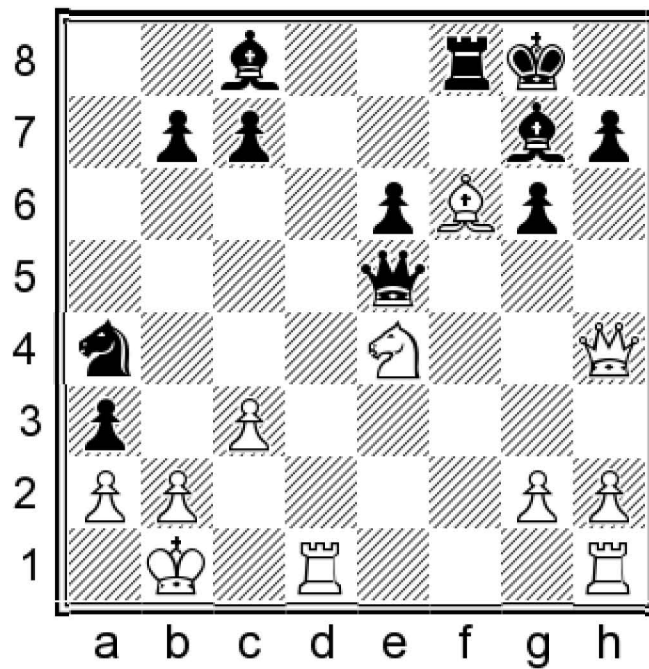


Position after: 21.Kb1!

A) 21...axb2 Now after the cute shot 22.Be7 Rf4 23.Ng5!! Black will soon have to give back his queen: 23...Rxb4 24.Rd8+ Bf8 25.Rxf8+ Kg7 26.Rhf1 and now 26...Qf5 possibly saves the day. The Indian GM then carries on over 10 more moves to reach an ending where Black is worse but has very decent drawing chances. I was dissatisfied with that outcome and examined the following alternatives.

B) 21...Nd5 22.Rhe1 axb2 Now 23.Nf6+?? Bxf6 24.Rxe5 Nxc3+ 25.Kxb2 Nxd1+ wins for Black but 23.Rd3! with the idea of 24.Rh3 is irritating.

C) 21...Ra4!? Black threatens the spirited ...Rb4!. 22.Bxa4 [Here or on the next move 22.Be7 Rf4 gives Black an improved version of 21...axb2 22.Be7 Rf4.] 22...Nxa4 23.Bf6!

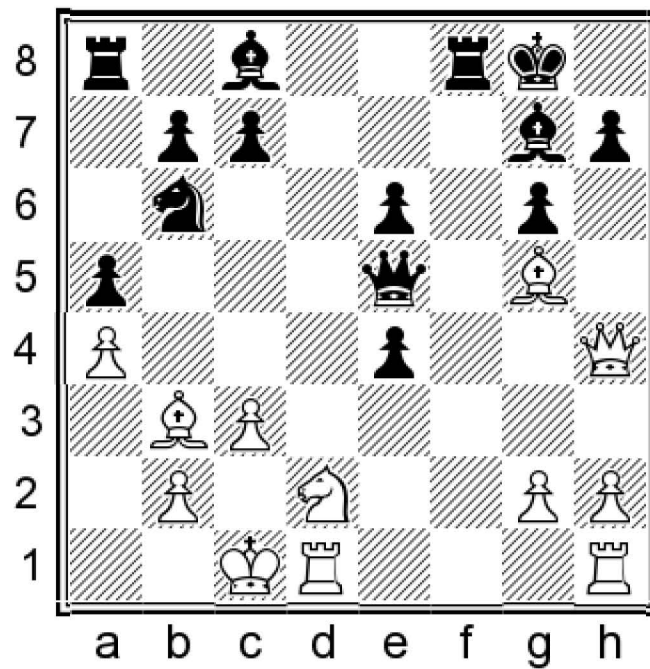


Position after: 23.Bf6!

This may look risky for White but the engine is not perturbed. 23...Qf5! [If 23...Nxc3+ 24.bxc3 Bxf6 25.Nxf6+ Rxf6 26.Qb4 or 23...Bxf6 24.Nxf6+ Qxf6 25.Qxa4 White stands a bit better objectively but his king is not totally safe.] 24.Bxg7 g5!! 25.Qe1 Kxg7 ∞

D) 21...Bd7!? 22.Rhe1 axb2 23.Nf6+ Bxf6 24.Rxe5 Bxe5 Black has gotten enough for the queen and, unlike Negi's 21...axb2 line, any result remains possible.

Back to 19.a4.



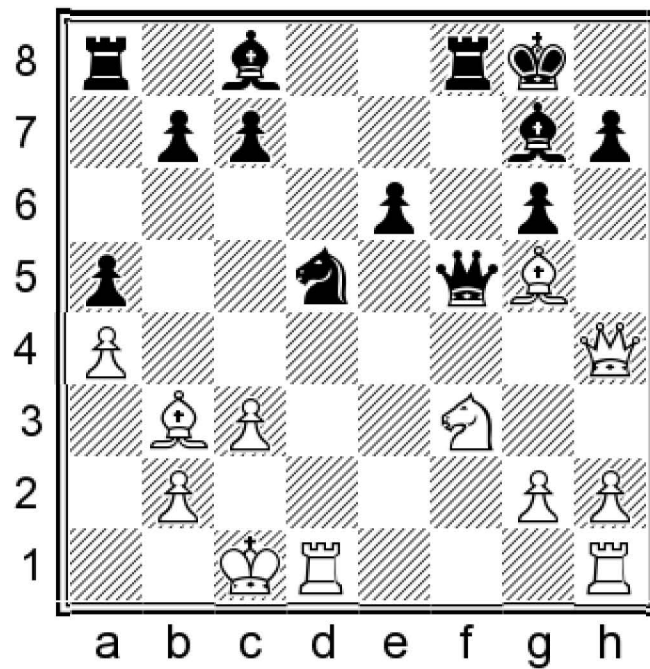
Position after: 19.a4

19...e3

A) 19...Nd5 20.Rhf1 with the nasty threat of 21.Nc4 which would trap the black queen.

B) 19...Bd7 20.Rhe1 and so on is Negi's main line. It finishes in an endgame where Black is a pawn down with fair hopes of escaping.

20.Nf3 Qf5 21.Bxe3 Nd5 22.Bg5

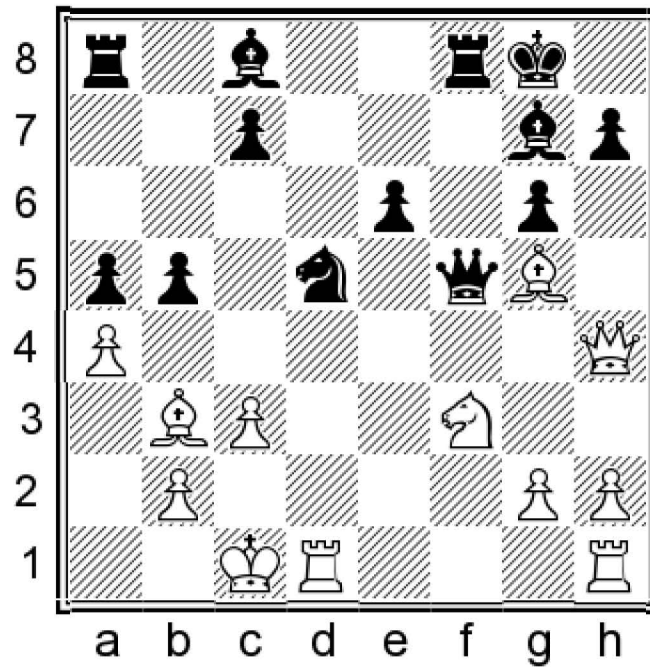


Position after: 22.Bg5

Negi says this “requires deeper analysis... but White has at least enough compensation for his pawn”.

At this stage 22...c6 23.Rhe1 is in White’s favor, and so is the alternative 22...Nf4 23.Rhf1 Nxg2 24.Qg3 Nf4 25.Nd4².

I suggest checking 22...b5!? with the obvious aim of generating counterplay against the enemy king.

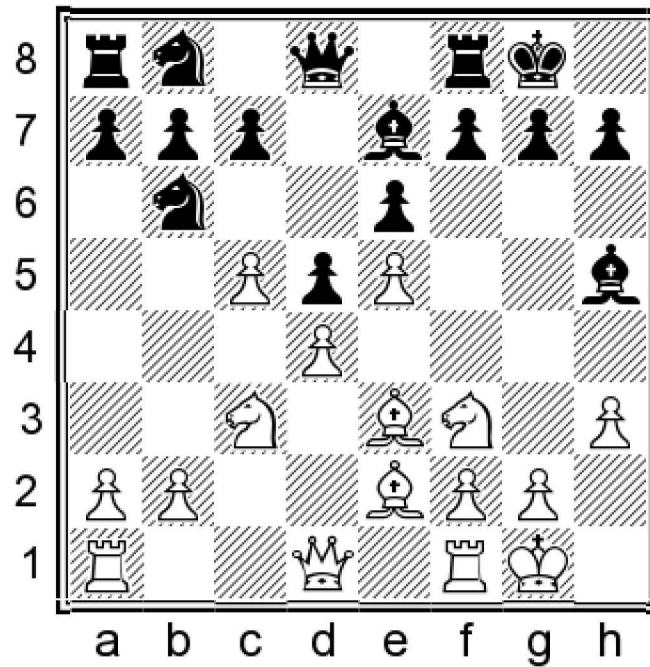


Position after: 22...b5!?

The machine seems to agree that this idea is not plainly stupid after 23.Rhf1 bxa4 or 23.Nd4 Qf7 24.axb5 [24.Nxb5 c6,,] 24...a4 25.Bxd5 exd5∞.

Negi deserves full credit for having spotted the novelty 12.dxe5!, which sets Black new challenges to overcome. I hope I have managed to do so...

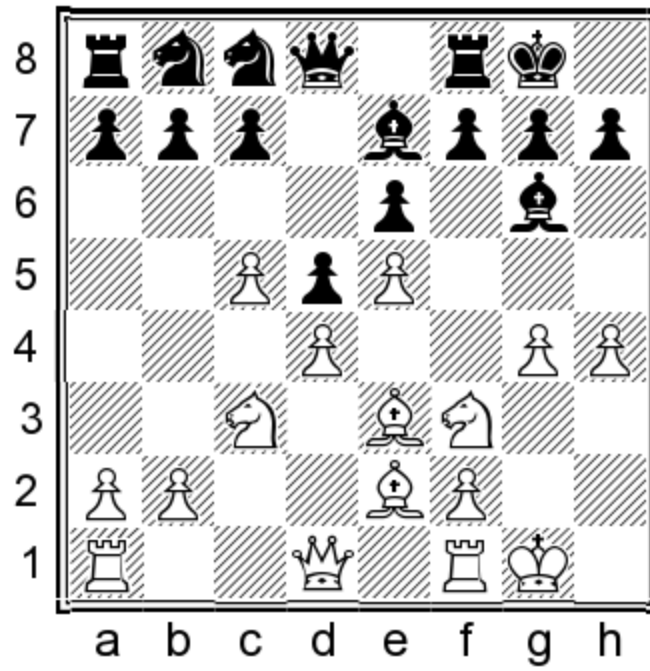
k) 4.Nf3 Bg4 5.Be2 e6 6.c4 Nb6 7.0-0 with 11.c5 (according to Negi)
1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.Nf3 Bg4 5.Be2 e6 6.c4 Nb6 7.0-0 Be7
8.Nc3 0-0 9.h3 Bh5 10.Be3 d5 11.c5



Position after: 11.c5

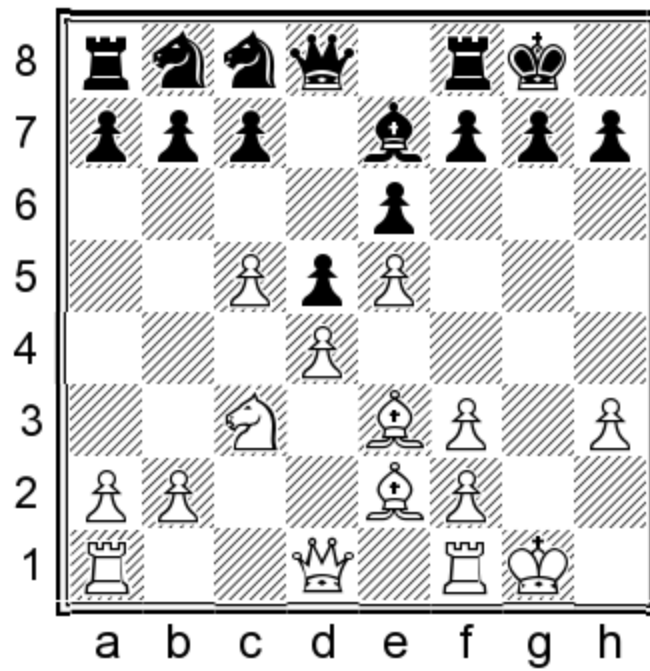
11...Bxf3

The bishop-knight trade is so automatic that I “forgot” to mention 11...Nc8? 12.g4! Bg6± when Black runs the risk of suffocating even without Negi’s novelty 13.h4!N.



Position after: 13.h4!N

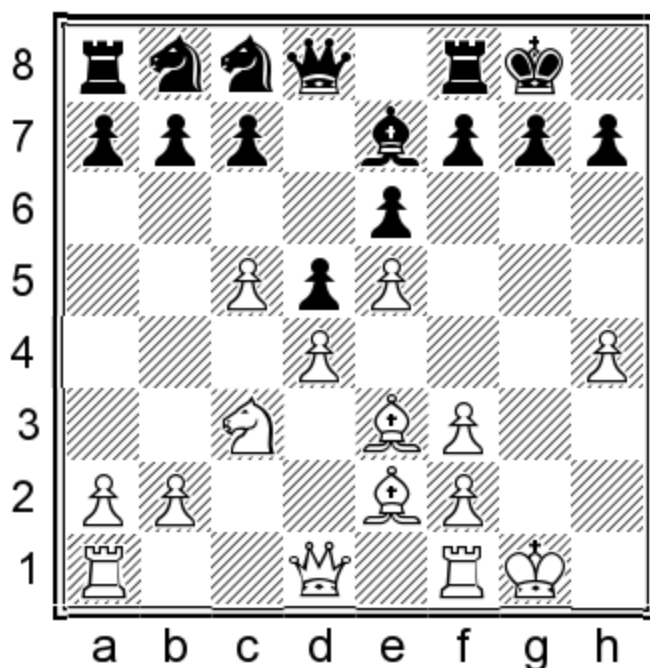
12.gxf3 Nc8



Position after: 12...Nc8

13.f4

13.h4!?N is Negi's brilliant idea, the point of which is to prevent the usual blockade with ...Bh4, but the Indian GM explains that it needs to be prepared with 13.f4 to gain maximal efficacy.



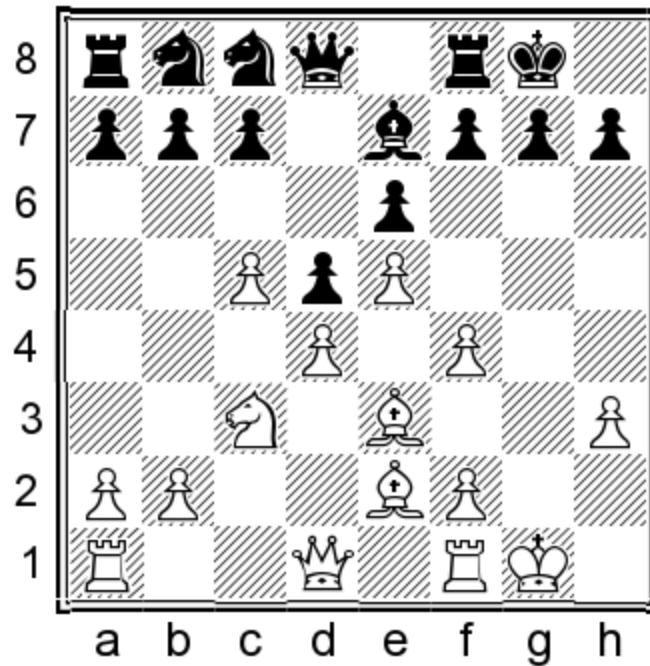
Position after: 13.h4!?N

A) 13...b6! is a clear way to parity. 14.b4 a5. 15.a3 [In the event of 15.b5 Black gains approximate equality with 15...bxc5 16.dxc5 Nd7 17.Nxd5 Bxc5.] 15...axb4 16.axb4 Rxa1 17.Qxa1 bxc5 18.bxc5 Bxh4 19.Kg2 f6 20.Rh1 fxe5 21.dxe5 d4 22.Rd1 Nc6 23.Nb5= White will recover the invested pawn but the position has been simplified and the currently idle c8-knight will soon reach d5.

B) White gets nice compensation if Black accepts the challenge with 13...Bxh4 14.Kg2 and now either 14...f6 15.Rh1 fxe5 16.dxe5, with the possible follow-up f4, Bd3 or Bg4 and Ne2 next, or 14...f5 15.f4 when

Black has available the spirited 15...Bg5!?, having in mind 16.b4 Bh6 or 16.fxg5 f4=.

Let's see what happens after 13.f4.

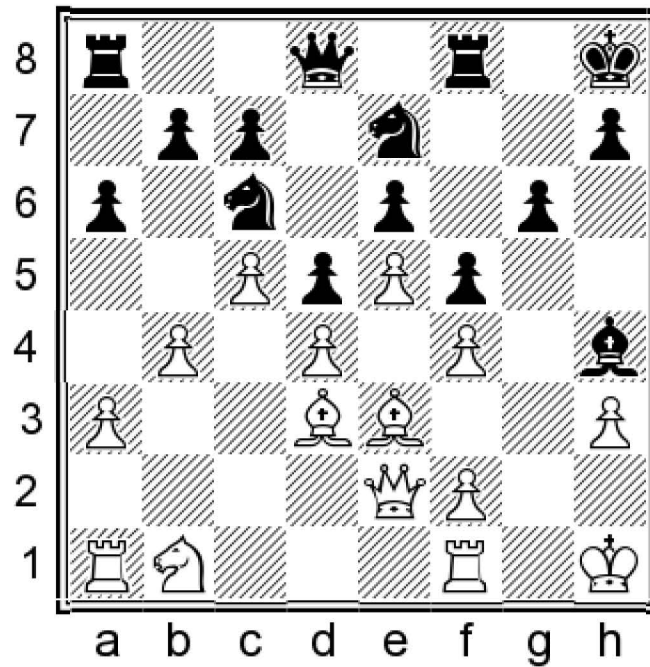


Position after: 13.f4

13...Nc6

13...Bh4 14.Bd3! g6 15.Qg4

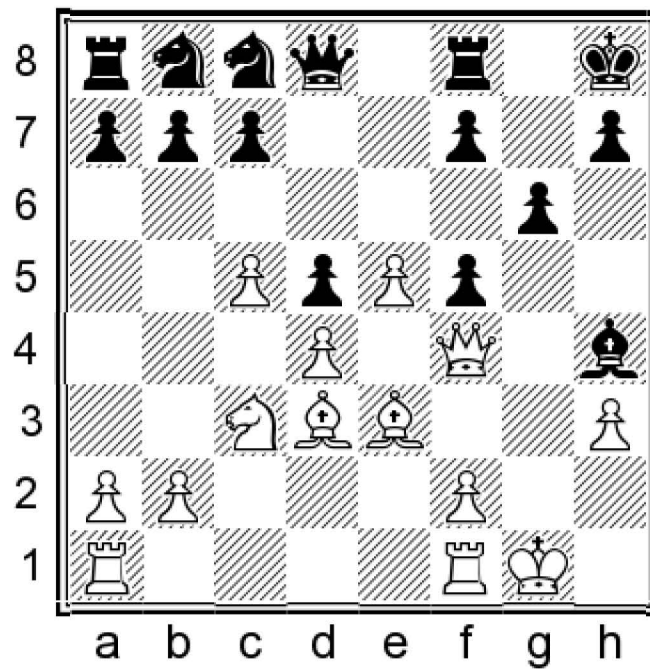
A) 15...f5!? 16.Qe2 Nc6 17.a3 Kh8 18.b4 a6 19.Kh1 N8e7 Now 20.Nb1!
is Negi's improvement over Hendriks, W – Bosch, J Netherlands 1996.



Position after: 20.Nb1!

Is it enough to crack the black armor after 20...Ng8 21.Nd2 Nh6 22.Nf3 Nf7 or 22...Be7? I am not sure. At any rate, next on the agenda is 23.Bd2± followed by a3-a4 and b4-b5.

B) 15...Kh8 16.f5!?N Here I would give Negi's novelty a solid "!". After 16...exf5 17.Qf4 the coordination between Black's forces is disturbed and he will have a hard time trying to defend.



Position after: 17.Qf4

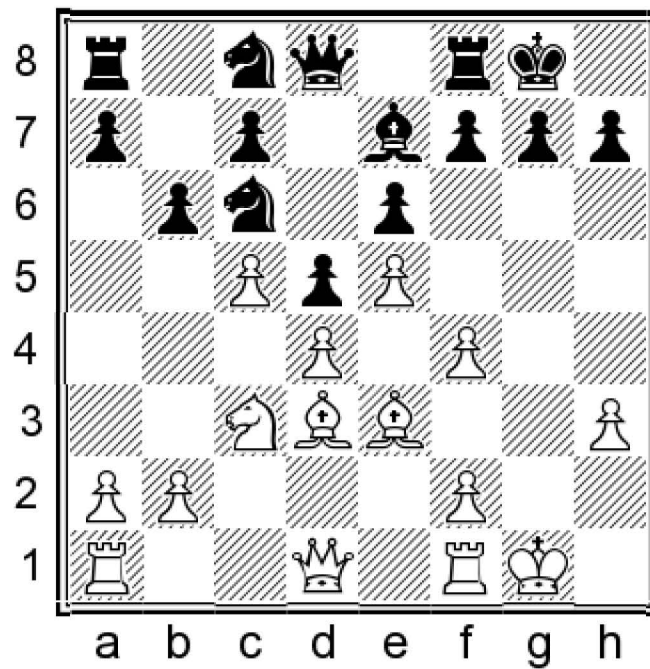
For instance, 17...Nc6 18.Nxd5, or 17...Be7 18.Kh2 or even 18.h4!?, or finally Negi's main line: 17...c6 18.Kh2 Na6 19.Bxa6 bxa6 20.Ne2 Be7 21.Rg1 Rg8 22.Ng3 or again 21.h4,.

14.Bd3!

14.h4 lets Black off the hook: 14...Bxc5! 15.dxc5 d4=.

14...g6

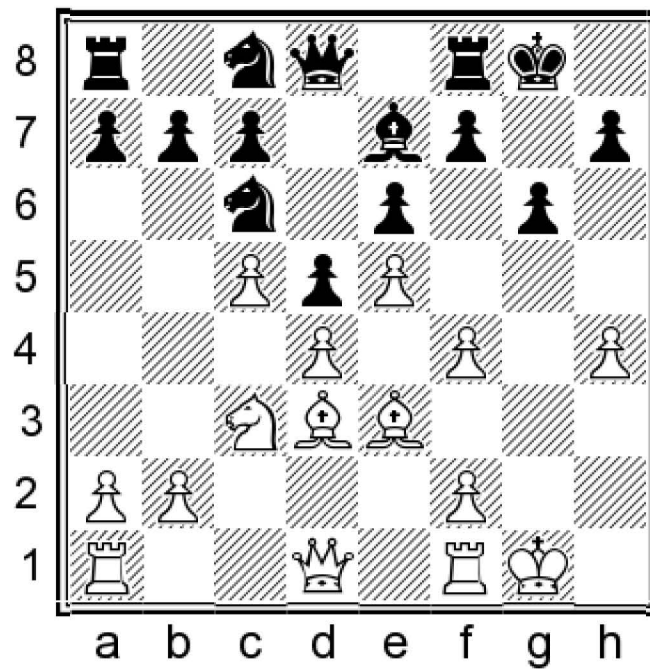
In the event of the dubious 14...b6?!



Position after: 14...b6?!

15.Qa4 [cleanest, although after 15.f5!?N 15...bxc5 16.f6 Bxf6 17.exf6 Qxf6 White also stands better] 15...Nxd4 16.Qxd4 bxc5 17.Qa4 Black lacks adequate compensation since if 17...d4 then 18.Rad1 is problematic.

15.h4!N



Position after: 15.h4!N

Here we go!

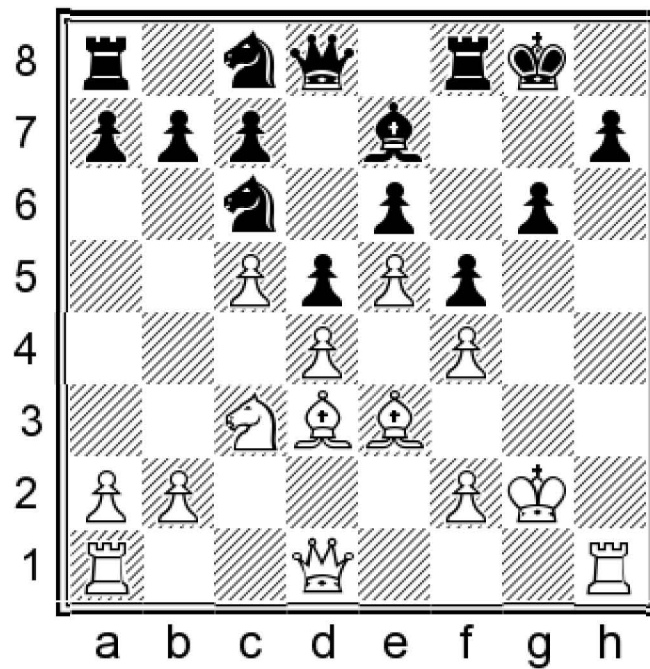
15...Bxh4

15...Bxc5 16.dxc5 d4 17.Ne4 In contrast with 14.h4 Bxc5, the knight is now heading for f6: 17...dxe3 18.fxe3 N8e7 19.h5f.

16.Kg2 Be7

16...f5 is playable for Black but his opponent will gradually advance on the queenside and possibly double (or threaten to) on the h-file. Despite his material deficit, objectively White is running absolutely no risk of losing this position.

17.Rh1 f5



Position after: 17...f5

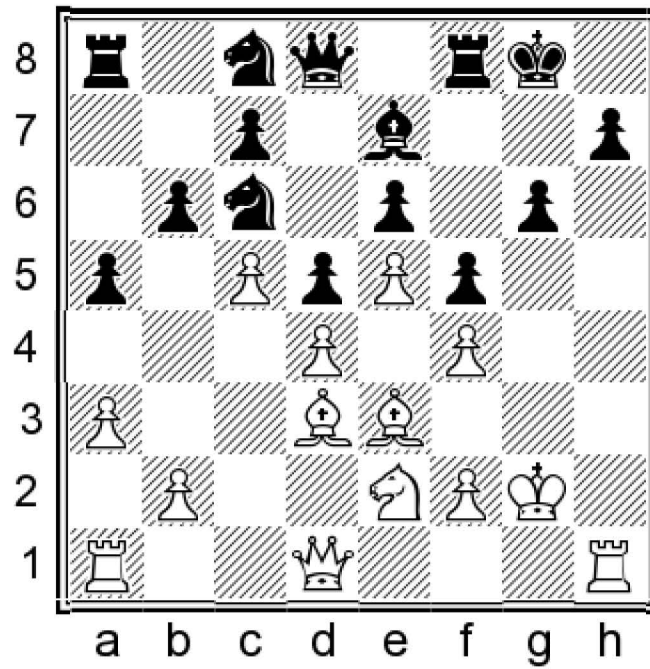
18.a3

18.exf6?! Bxf6 [Funnily, 18...Rxf6?? 19.f5 is already lost for Black!]
19.Rxh7 N8e7 It's roughly equal.

18...a5 19.Ne2

19.Qa4!?

19...b6

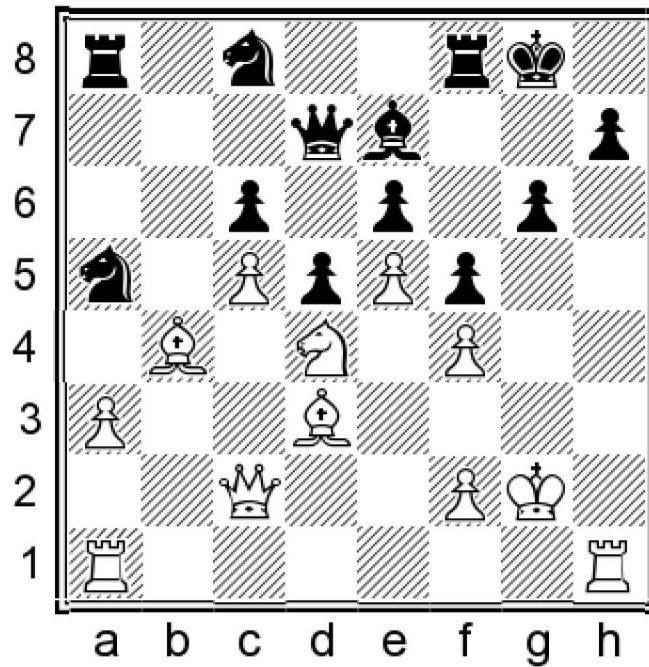


Position after: 19...b6

20.Bd2! Qd7 21.b4 Nd8! 22.Qc2! c6

22...axb4?! 23.axb4 Rxa1 24.Rxa1 b5 25.Ra8 Black will suffer severe pressure on the queenside.

23.bxa5! bxc5 24.dxc5 Nb7 25.Bb4 Nxa5 26.Nd4



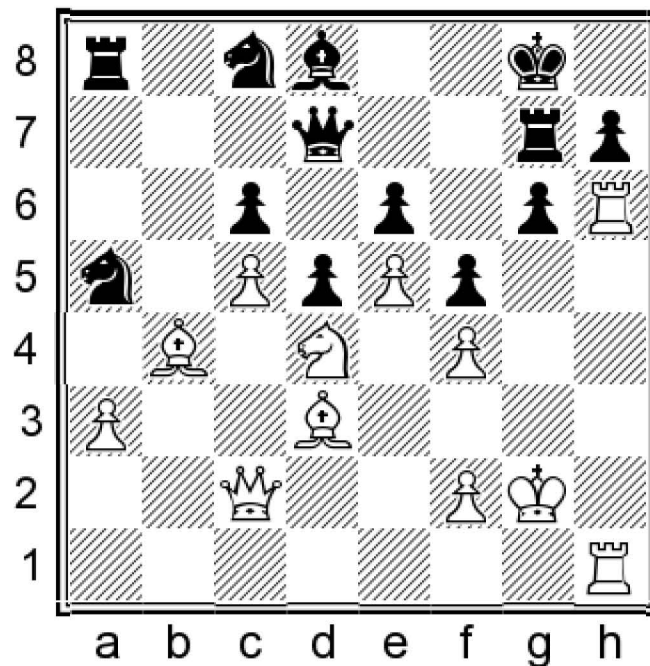
Position after: 26.Nd4

A very instructive picture: White is a pawn down and his structure is a wreck. In contrast, with all his foot-soldiers forming one pawn-island and placed on squares of the opposite color to his remaining bishop, the black position is “as harmonious as can be”. The white pieces, however, occupy dominant posts. A logical continuation could be the following.

26...Bd8 27.Rh6 Rf7 28.Rah1

28.Bxf5!? gxf5 29.Nxe6 Ne7 30.Kh1 Ng6 31.Nd4 Rg7 is messy and about level according to the engine.

28...Rg7[∞]

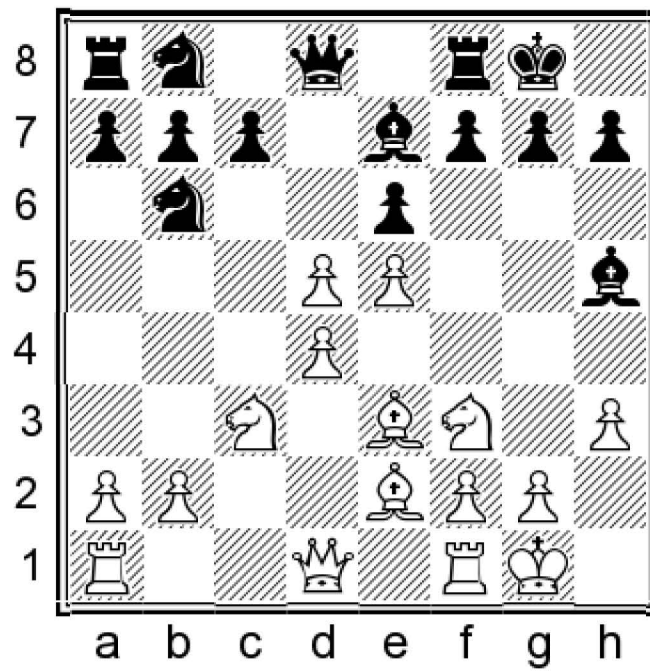


Position after: 28...Rg7

It isn't obvious how to make further progress for White. On the other hand, he still has at least sufficient compensation. If Black wants to try something active then ...Ne7 followed by ...Nc4 could do, intending Bxc4 ...dxc4 Qxc4 ...Nd5.

Conclusion: Kudos to Negi for his great discovery, the pawn sacrifice h3-h4. Overall it doesn't change the assessment that White is pressing but finding new ideas is always praiseworthy. Furthermore, Black has to face new problems and needs to be accurate to stay afloat.

**1) 4.Nf3 Bg4 5.Be2 e6 6.c4 Nb6 7.0-0 with 11.cxd5 (according to Negi)
 1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.Nf3 Bg4 5.Be2 e6 6.c4 Nb6 7.0-0 Be7
 8.Nc3 0-0 9.h3 Bh5 10.Be3 d5 11.cxd5!?**

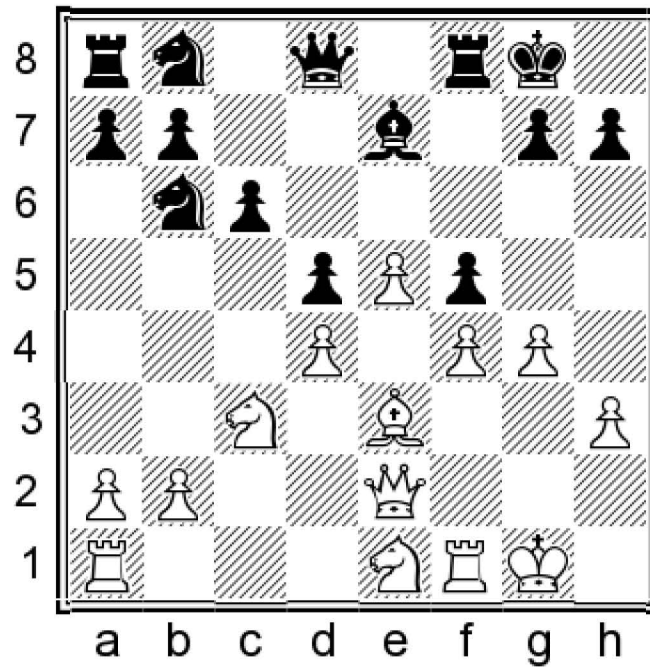


Position after: 11.cxd5!?

11...Nxd5

11...exd5 12.Ne1 Bxe2 13.Qxe2

A) 13...c6 14.f4 f5 15.g4

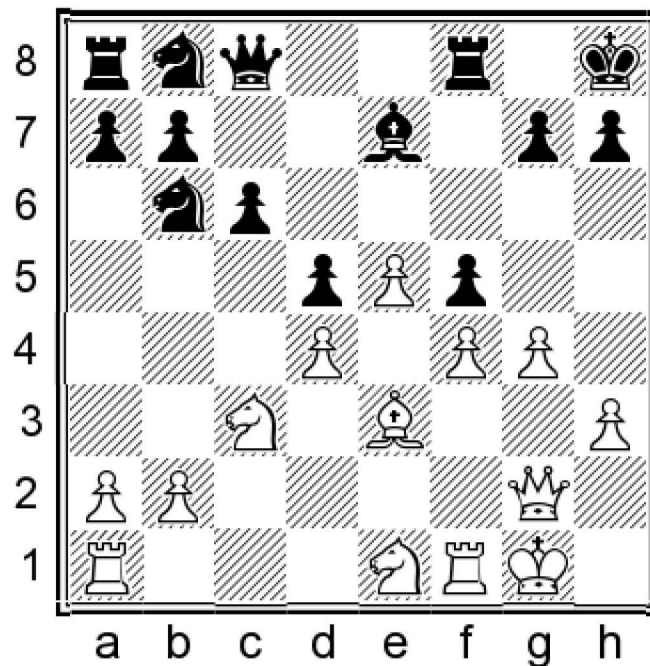


Position after: 15.g4

Perez Garcia – Peralta Malaga 2001. Negi states “White has interesting prospects on the kingside”, which is true again! After a subsequent ...g7-g6 gxf5 ...gxf5 White looks to be quicker on the g-file, so that ideally Black would recapture with a piece on f5. One of his major tasks then is to avoid being pushed back and having to allow f4-f5.

A1) 15...Bb4!?

A2) In the event of 15...Qc8 16.Qg2 Kh8

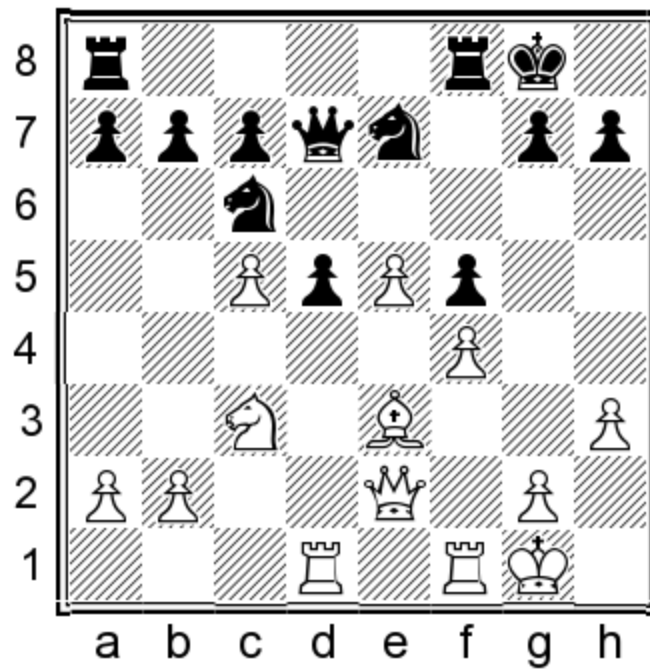


Position after: 16...Kh8

17.gxf5 [the slower approach 17.Ne2 g6 18.Kh2 is of course possible too] 17...Qxf5 18.Ne2 White is ready for 19.Ng3 but maybe 18...Qe4!? could somehow hold for Black.

A3) 15...Na6 16.gxf5 Rxf5 17.Qg4 g6 18.Ne2f Next will come 19.Ng3 and f4-f5; see the note to 15.g4.

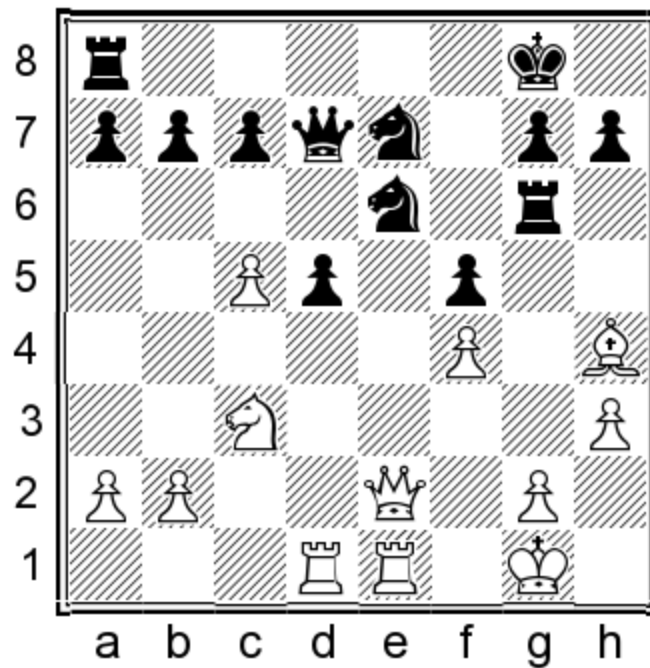
B) 13...Nc6 has been employed a few times by the late Alekhine expert GM Bagirov. The defect in comparison with 13...c6 seems to be the specific sequence that follows: 14.f4 f5 15.Nd3 Qd7 16.Nc5 Bxc5 17.dxc5 Nc8 18.Rad1 N8e7.



Position after: 18...N8e7

White must now press on d5 so as to complicate the knight transfer to e6.

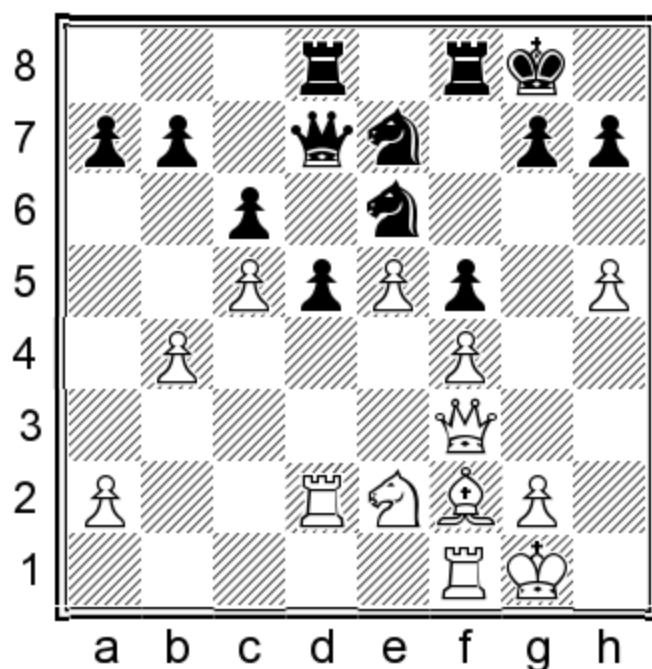
B1) 19.Bf2?! Nd8 20.e6 Nxe6 21.Rfe1 Rf6 22.Bh4 Rg6



Position after: 22...Rg6

23.Bxe7? [23.Qe5! kept the balance] 23...Nxf4, with a substantial edge to Black in the recent duel Ducarmon, Q (2483) – Bosch, J (2412) Netherlands 2018.

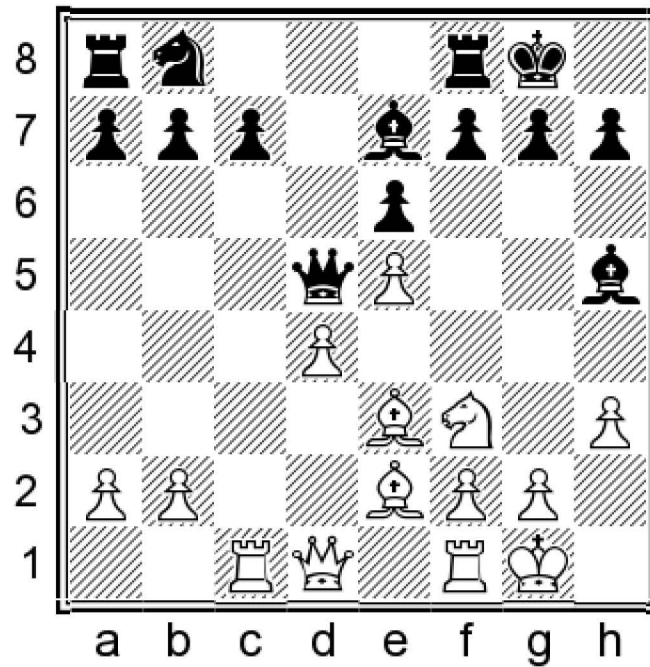
B2) I suggest 19.Qf3! Rad8 20.Rd2 Nb4 21.Bf2 c6 22.h4 Na6 23.h5 Nc7 24.Ne2 Ne6 25.b4².



Position after: 25.b4²

Black has succeeded in bringing his knight to e6 but the nasty Bf2-h4 will follow. The white h-pawn takes away the option of ...Ng6 and sometimes h5-h6 could come. Black is under some pressure here.

12.Nxd5 Qxd5 13.Rc1



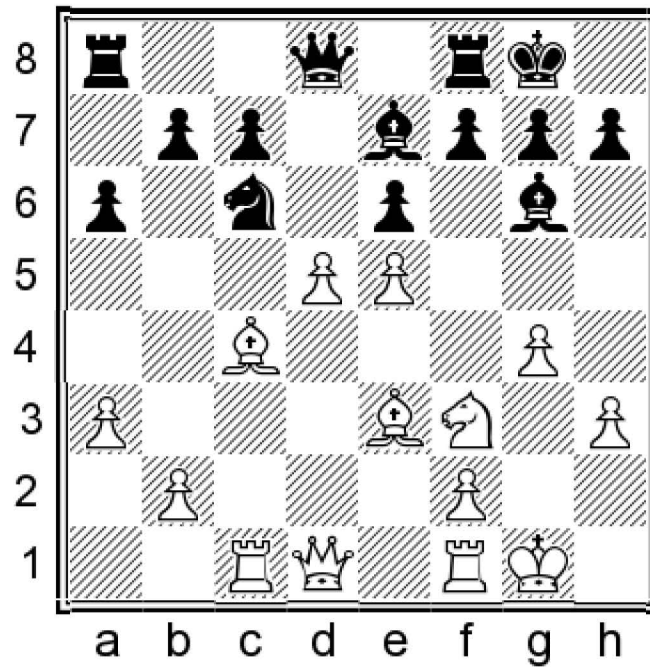
Position after: 13.Rc1

Negi: “White has chances of an advantage here too.” That’s true! It appears Black’s best now is to stop the d4-d5 push and therefore opt for 13...c6 rather than 13...Nc6. Here are some illustrations of that assertion.

13...c6

13...Nc6?! 14.Bc4

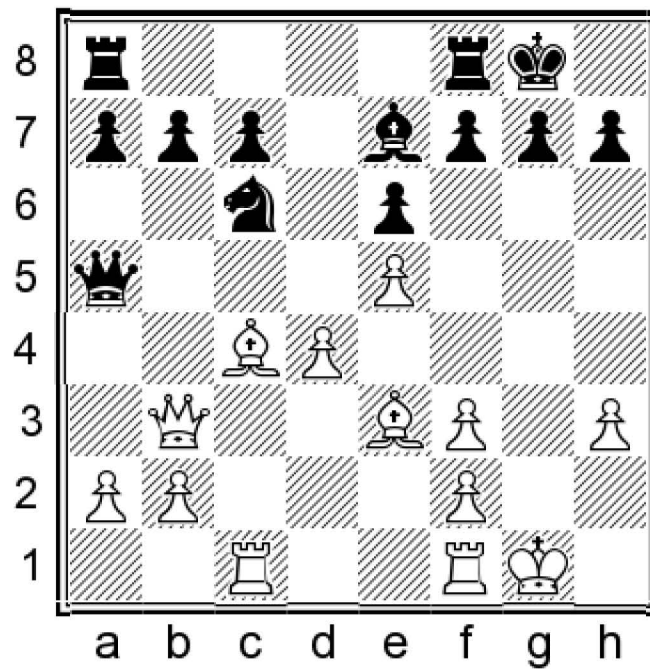
A) 14...Qd8 15.a3 Stopping ...Nb4-d5. 15...a6 16.g4 Bg6 17.d5± White has a serious advantage.



Position after: 17.d5±

This was seen in Fernandez Montoro, J (2135) – Ros Eiskisabel, J (2305) Murcia 1997, where after 17...exd5 18.Bxd5 Qe8 White should have preferred 19.Qb3 or 19.Bxc6 bxc6 20.Nd4 over 19.b4?! Rd8².

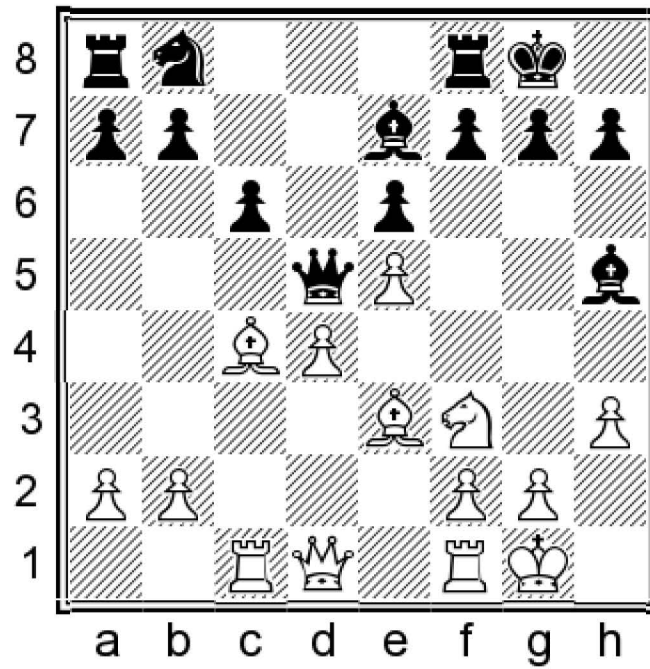
B) Or 14...Qa5 15.Qb3 Bxf3 16.gxf3.



Position after: 16.gxf3

Now 16...Rab8 17.Rfd1 occurred in the correspondence game Marek, S – Bazela, E Slovakia 2001, and trading queens by 16...Qb6 brings Black no relief after 17.d5! Qxb3 18.Bxb3 Nxe5 19.Rxc7. White stands much better in both cases.

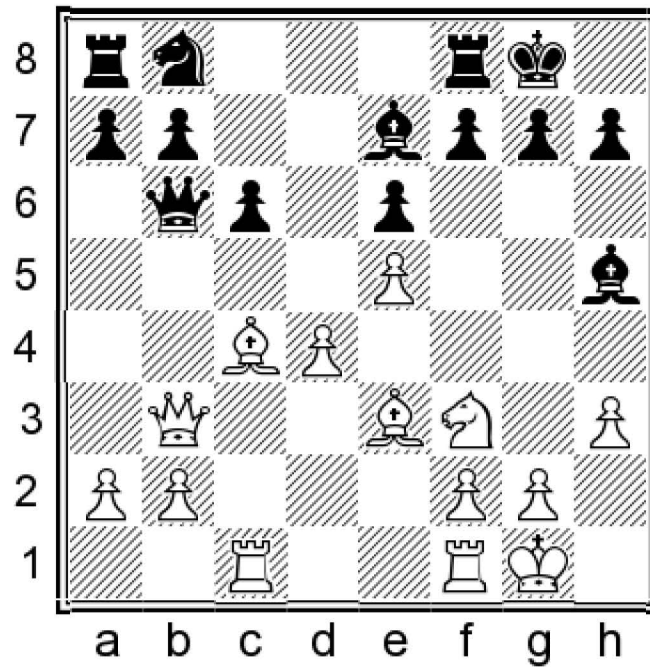
14.Bc4



Position after: 14.Bc4

14...Qd7!

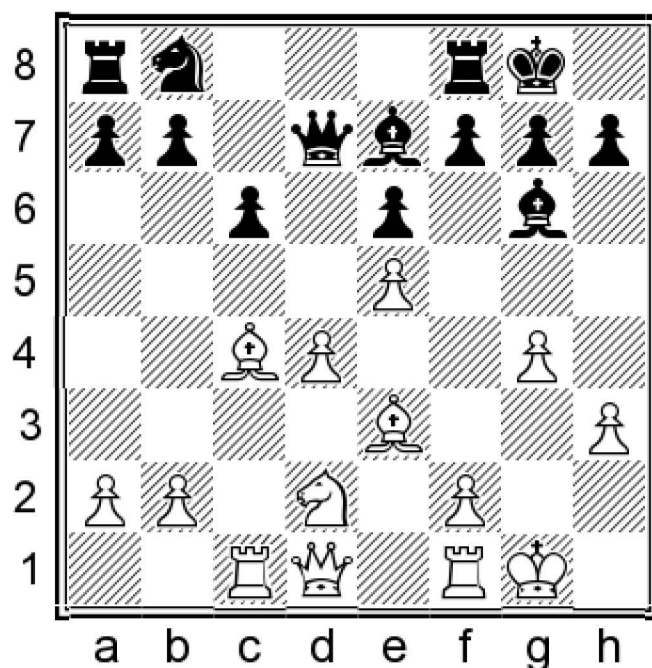
14...Qd8 15.Qb3 [White can insert 15.g4 Bg6 but he isn't afraid of the swap ...Bxf3; the priority in either case is to stop ...Nd7-b6.] 15...Qb6



Position after: 15...Qb6

The game Betko, L – Kantorik, M (2360) Prague 1992 then continued 16.Nd2 g5? [16...Qxb3 had to be played] 17.Bxe6!+-. Rather than letting his opponent exchange queens White could have tried 16.Bxe6 at once, obtaining a promising initiative after 16...Bxf3 17.gxf3 fxe6 18.Qxe6 Rf7 19.d5.

15.g4 Bg6 16.Nd2



Position after: 16.Nd2

16...b5

This was unclear in the correspondence game Marek, S (2421) – Ressler, V (2301) Slovakia 2005, and so would have been 16...Na6 and 16...a5.

Going back to move 11, if Black recaptures 11...exd5 we have apparently a tougher challenge than what I examined in the relevant section. I am, however, more confident that Black can solve his opening problems in the event of 11...Nxd5 12.Nxd5 Qxd5 13.Rc1 c6! 14.Bc4 Qd7!.

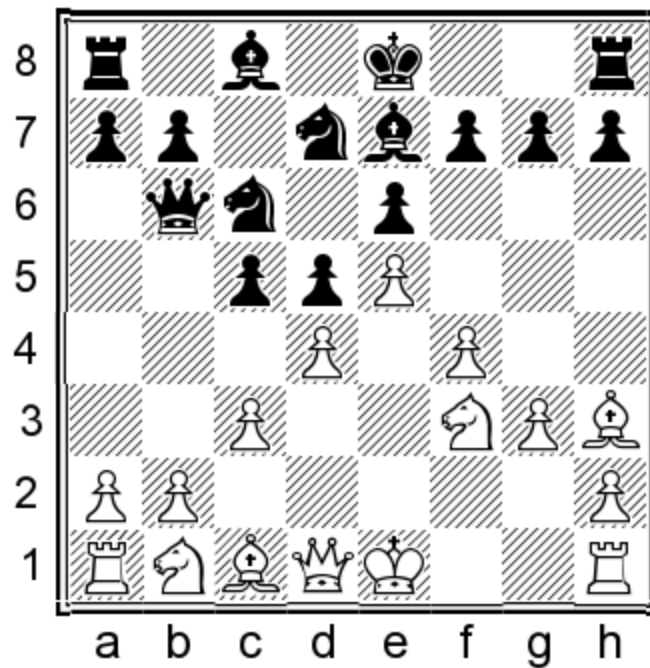
Conclusion: I have to confess I was relieved when this book was finished, especially since I feared beforehand what Negi would find and recommend. Though he did a pretty good job in my opinion, I am also satisfied with my own suggestions of how to counter his recent discoveries.

Show in Text Mode

Chapter 11

Exercises

1



■ *Play has transposed into a position akin to the French Defense. How should Black generate counterplay here?*

Show/Hide Solution

9...f6!

This typical undermining move guarantees Black sufficient counterplay. For instance, after

10.Bxe6 cxd4 11.cxd4

there is

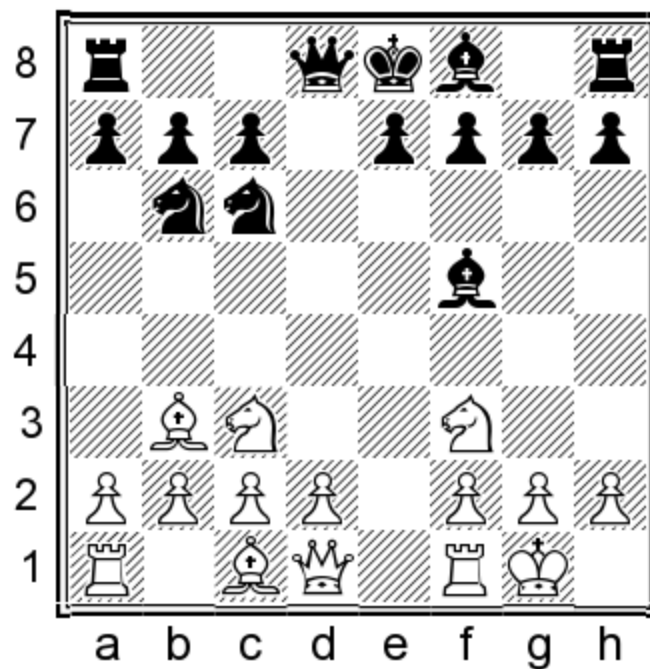
11...Ndx5!.

And the materialistic

11.Bxd7+ Bxd7 12.cxd4

offers ample compensation on the light squares.

2



■ *What is Black's most ambitious approach, here or on the next move?*

Show/Hide Solution

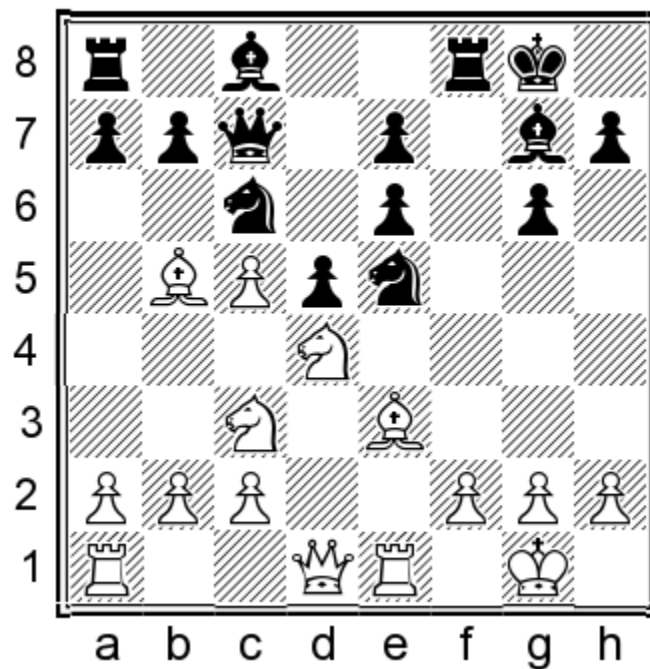
7...Na5

In my opinion gobbling the white light-squared bishop now or after

7...e6 8.d4 Na5

represents the best way to try playing for an advantage, avoiding for instance the flattening 8...Be7 9.d5.

3



■ Which bolt from the blue secures Black a big advantage now?

Show/Hide Solution

12...Ng4!!

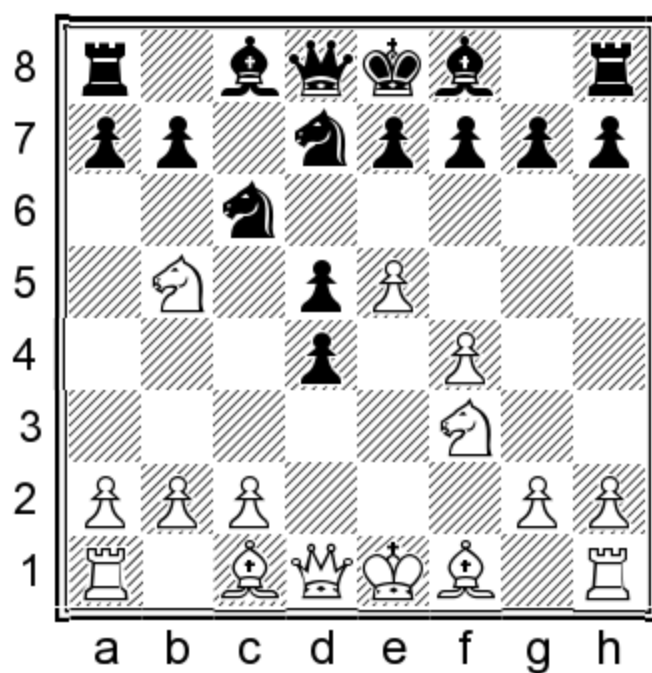
A cold shower for White; Black is threatening the lethal 13...Qxh2+ and intends to meet the obvious

13.Qxg4

with

13...Nxd4 14.Bxd4 Rf4.

4



■ What is Black's most accurate way to achieve full parity?

Show/Hide Solution

7...Ndb8!

Black clears the way for his light-squared bishop and is ready for an eventual “knight relay” on the c6-square.

Now both

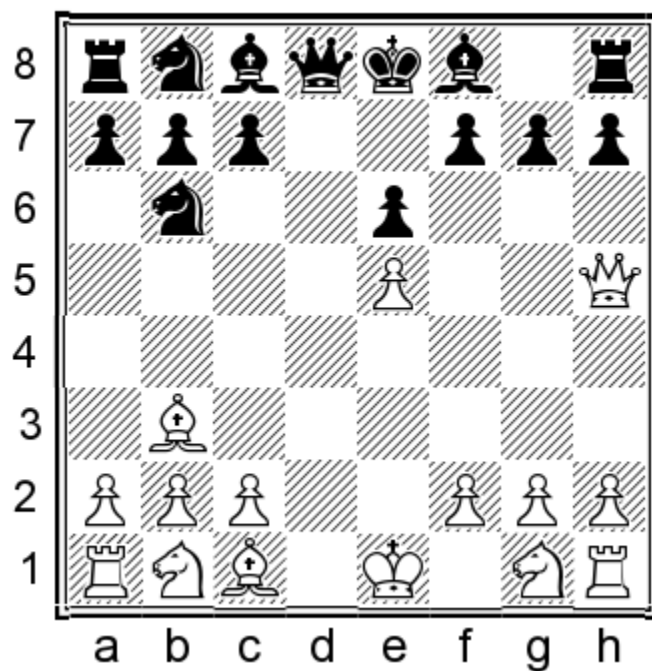
8.Nbxd4 Bg4

and

8.Nfxd4 a6 9.Nc3 Nxd4 10.Qxd4 e6

with the idea of 11...Nc6 are about equal.

5



■ *What is Black's most efficient way to continue?*

Show/Hide Solution

7...a5!

A ploy you should keep in mind each time the white bishop lands on b3. Black gains space and after the most frequent reply 8.a4 he would go ...Na6-c5 and possibly trade on b3. After

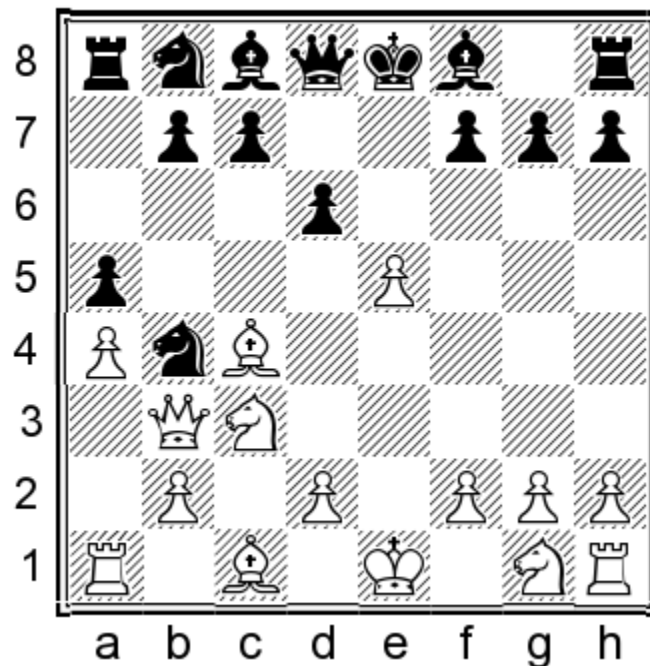
8.a3 Nc6 9.Nf3 a4 10.Ba2

the creative

10...Ra5!

threatens ...g7-g6 followed by ...Nxe5.

6



■ *By pushing his a- and c-pawns White has created weaknesses in his own camp. This explains why Black's unexpected solution to the attack on f7*

works well here. But which solution am I talking about?

Show/Hide Solution

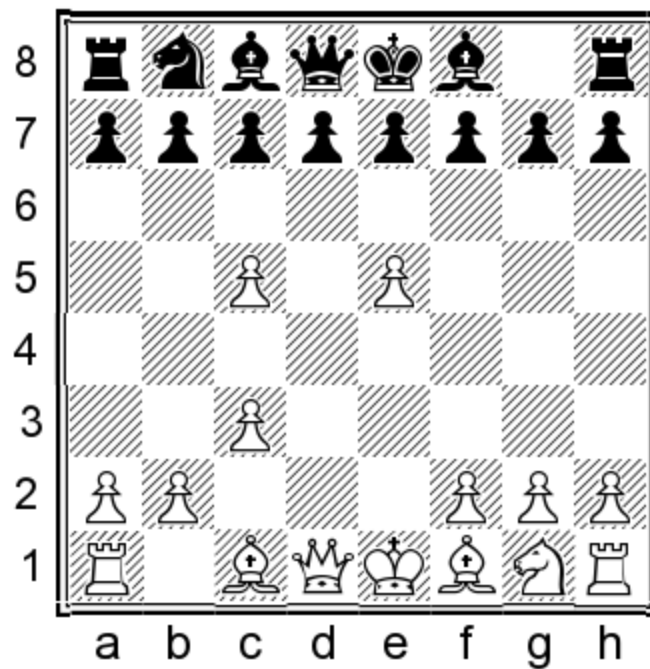
9...Be6!

Not the only way but probably the simplest. If White now grabs a pawn by means of

10.Bxe6 fxe6 11.Qxe6+ Be7f

he then has to parry the dual threats of ...Nc2+ and ...Nd3+.

7



■ *How should Black proceed to avoid early problems here?*

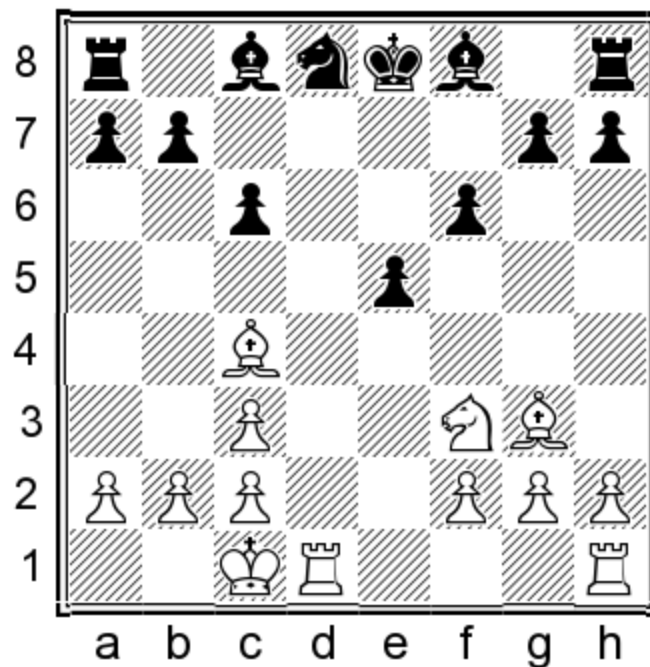
Show/Hide Solution

6...Nc6!

Black wants to wait for 7.Nf3 before pushing his e-pawn.

In the event of 6...e6?!, 7.Qg4! is annoying because the black development is somewhat hindered.

8



■ Which precise move puts Black out of danger in this tricky endgame?

Show/Hide Solution

11...Nf7!

11...Ne6?! 12.Rhe1 and a piece sacrifice on e5 is in the air.

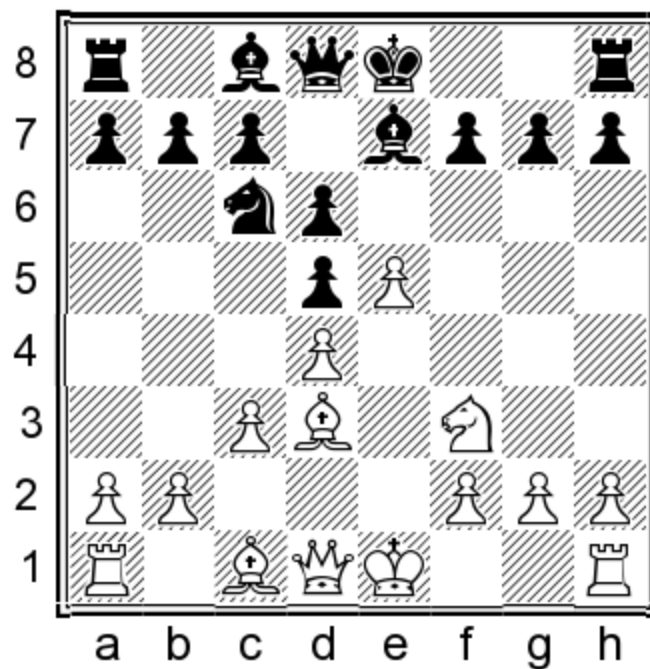
11...Nf7! 12.Rhe1 Be7 13.Nd2 h5!

Seizing space.

14.h3 h4 15.Bh2 g5!

The opening of the position by f2-f4 is prevented and Black is safe.

9



■ *White would welcome the trade ...dxe5 while exd6 would rather suit Black. How to continue then?*

Show/Hide Solution

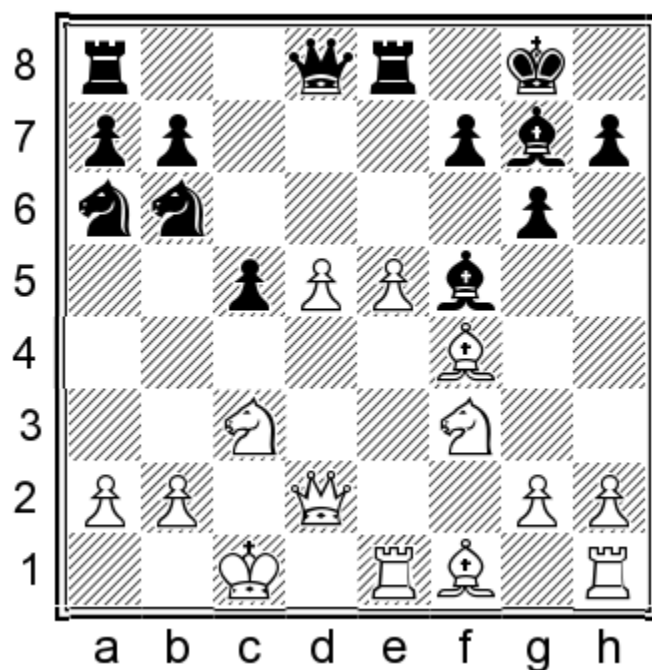
8...Bg4!

Simply threatening to grab the e5-pawn. If White is now reluctant to exchange on d6 he should embark upon

9.Qb3 0-0 10.Qxb7 Qe8!

which is obviously quite risky.

10



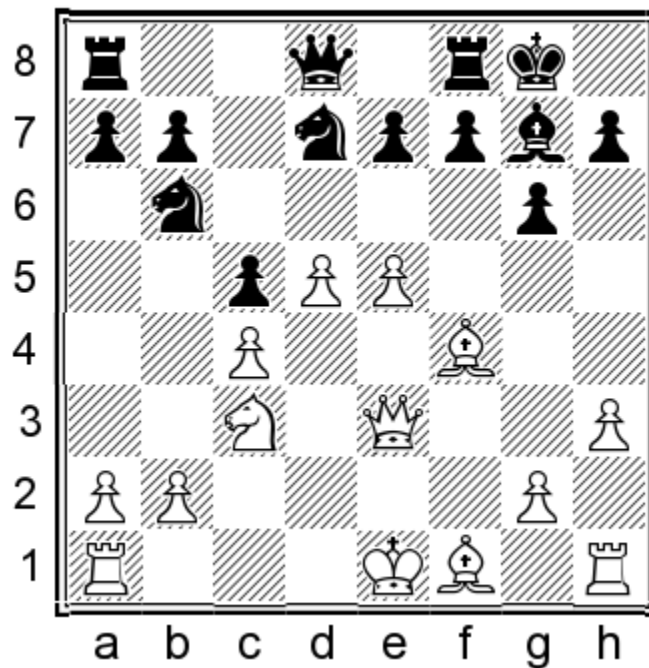
□ *This double-edged position of the 6...c5 7.d5 g6 line is quite important. What thematic idea will Black pursue, immediately after 15.Rg1*

or on the next move after 15.Bg5 Qc8 16.--?

Show/Hide Solution

In both cases Black would like to plonk his a6-knight on d3 and for that purpose he needs to push ...c5-c4 first.

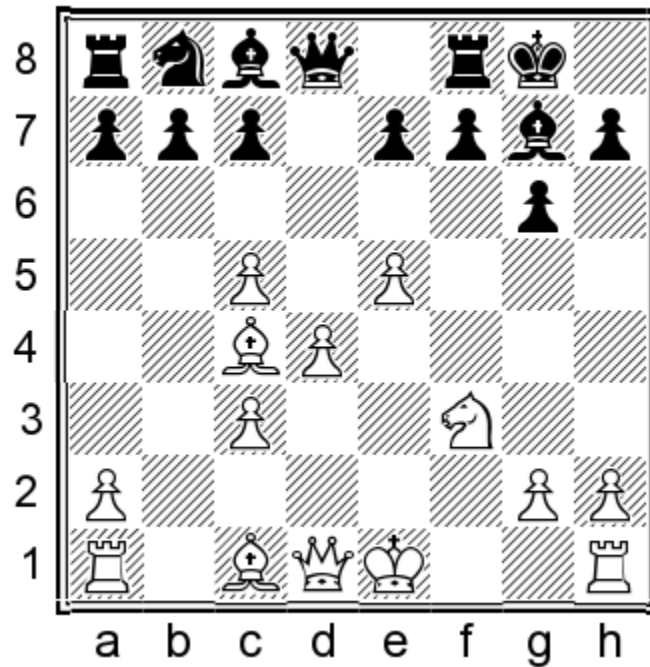
11



■ *White has just protected his under-fire e-pawn with 13.Qe3 (13.Qe4 would call for the same reply). How to intensify the pressure?*

Show/Hide Solution

13...Qb8!



■ *How should Black proceed to get some activity here?*

Show/Hide Solution

11...Nc6

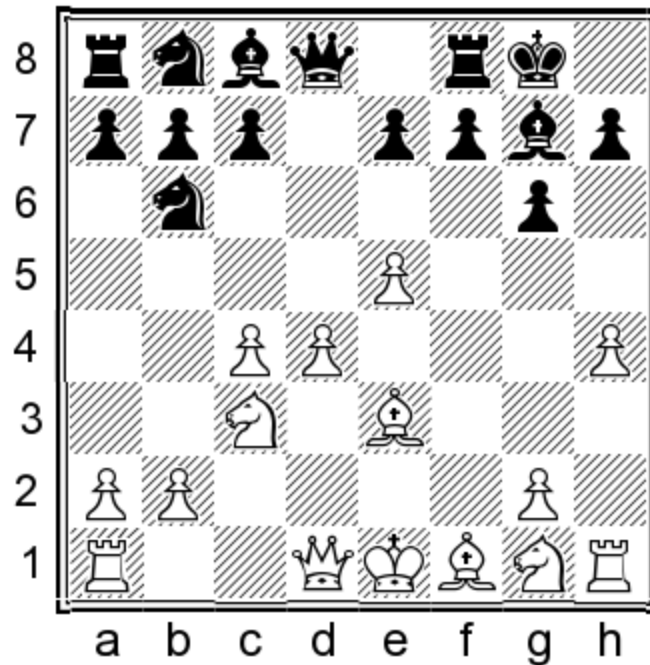
11...b6? 12.Ng5! Black runs into problems.

Black should first dislodge the enemy bishop from its post and after

11...Nc6 12.0-0 Na5 13.Bd3

get rid of the annoying c5-pawn with

13...b6!,,.



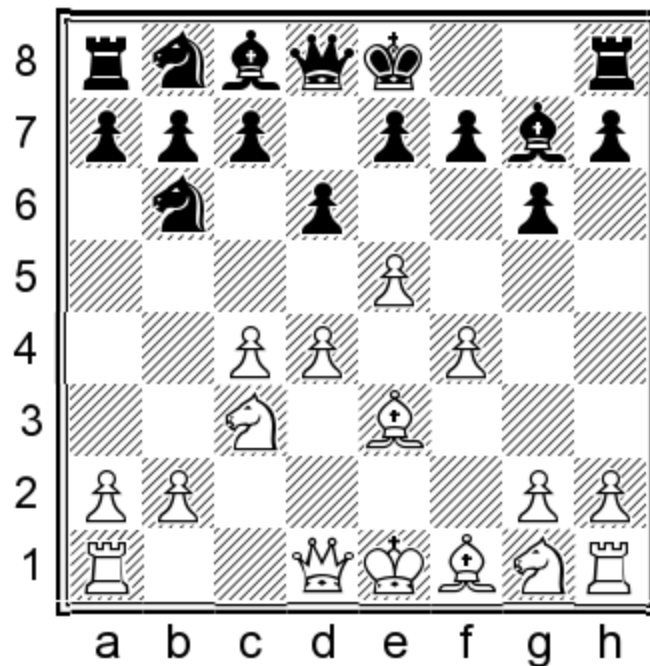
■ Besides the standard way of undermining the white center, namely 9...c5, which provocative move also secures Black adequate counterplay?

Show/Hide Solution

9...Be6!?

This move also applies if White chooses 9.Nf3 instead of 9.h4.

10.d5 Bc8 11.Nf3 Bg4,,



■ Which key move, already seen in a very similar situation, is here crucial?

Show/Hide Solution

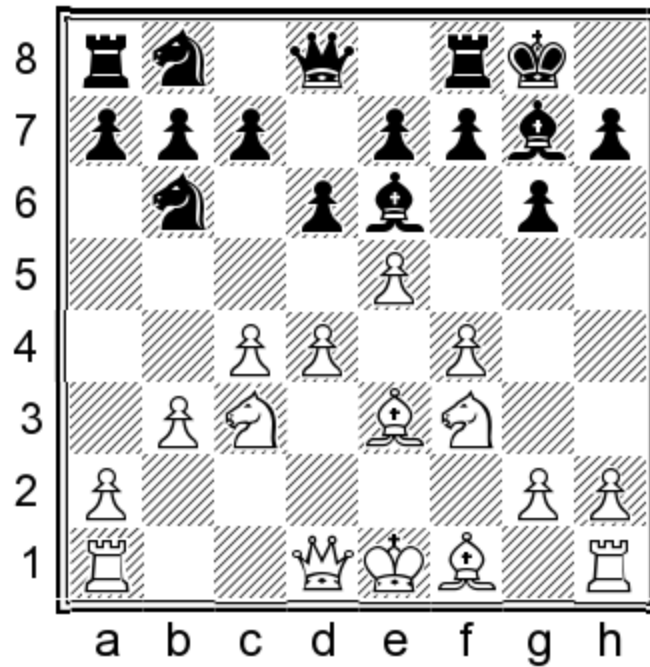
7...Be6!

After any other move White would seriously consider c4-c5, while now

8.c5?! Nd5

gets him nowhere.

With 7...Be6! Black incites the thrust d4-d5, which would weaken the defenses of the e5-pawn. Covering the c4-pawn with b2-b3 could lead to later problems on the a1-h8 diagonal, whereas Qd1-b3 would be met by ...a7-a5!



■ *White has a seemingly massive grip on the center. How to contest it?*

Show/Hide Solution

9...c5!

This active measure destroys the pride of the white position. After

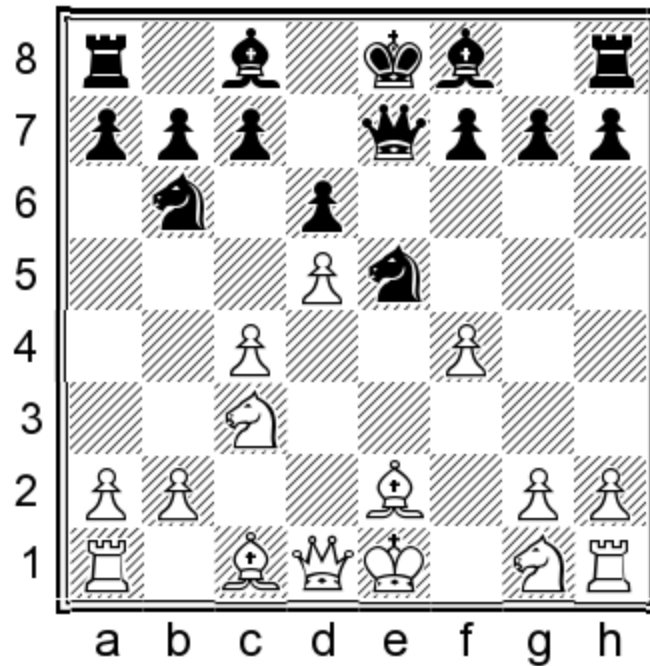
10.dxc5 N6d7 11.cxd6 exd6 12.Qxd6

Black reveals the point.

12...Nxe5!

Black gets a nice position.

16



■ Where should the attacked black knight jump to now?

Show/Hide Solution

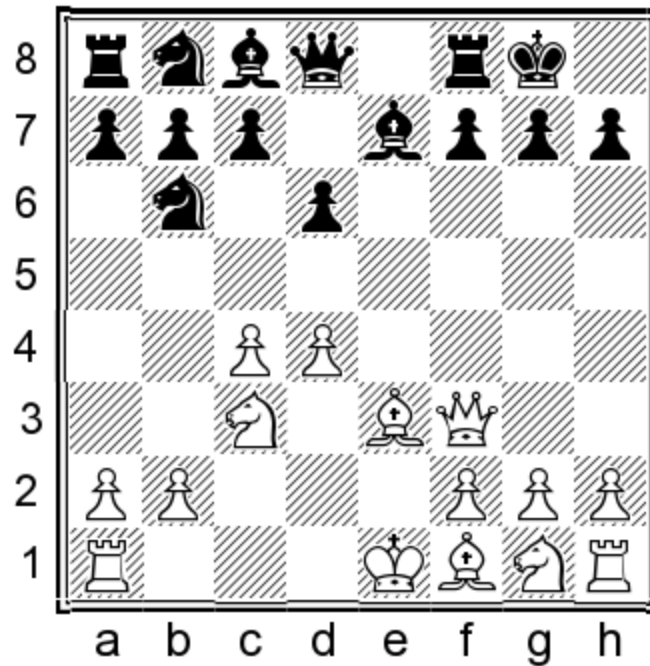
9...Ng4!

After 9...Ng4 the horse is ready to bounce to e3 while 9...Nexc4? may appear like a pawn for free but after the hidden 10.Kf2 White threatens Bxc4 ...Nxc4 Qa4+ as well as some nasty things along the e-file.

9...Ng4! 10.Qd4 c5 11.dxc6 bxc6

The position is unclear.

17

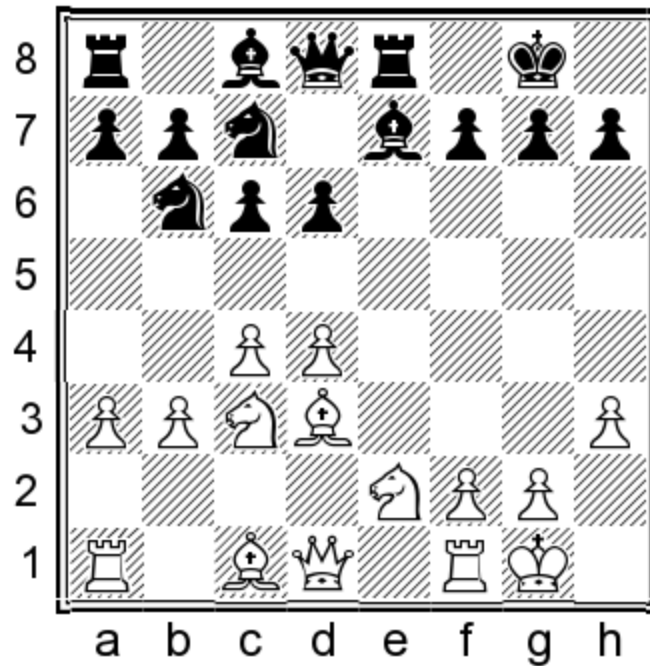


■ *An offensive albeit not quite healthy line for White. What is the safest path for Black here?*

Show/Hide Solution

8...c6! 9.0-0-0 d5 10.c5 N6d7

With ...b7-b6 to follow, this is definitely quieter than the razor-sharp 8...Nc6 9.0-0-0 Be6.

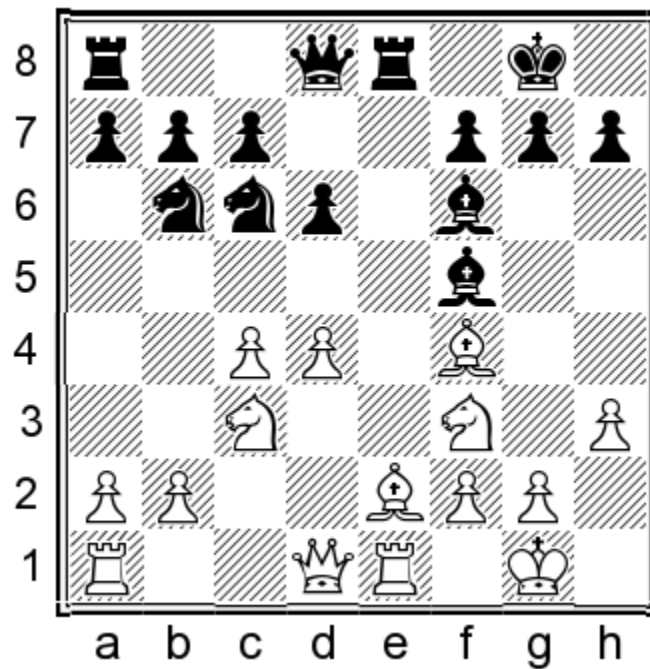


■ *What is the most common way for Black to continue and how should he arrange his pieces then?*

Show/Hide Solution

12...d5 13.c5 Nd7

Black plans ...Ne6, ...g6, ...Bf8-g7 and eventually ...Nd7-f6, which is an harmonious way for him to regroup.

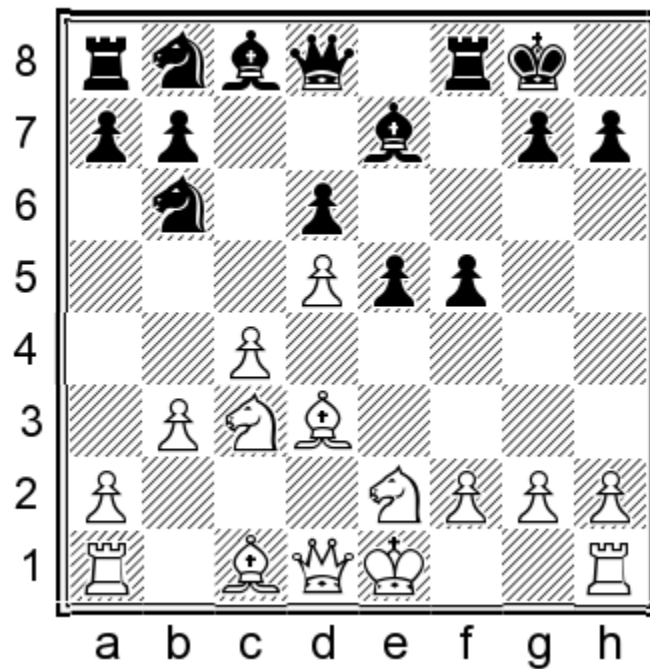


■ *White's last move was inaccurate, allowing Black to simplify and achieve a level game. How?*

Show/Hide Solution

12...Nb4! 13.Rc1 Rxe2

Black will regain the exchange with 14...Nd3. He then remains with the pair of bishops and, given that he has less space, he is happy to have traded two sets of pieces.

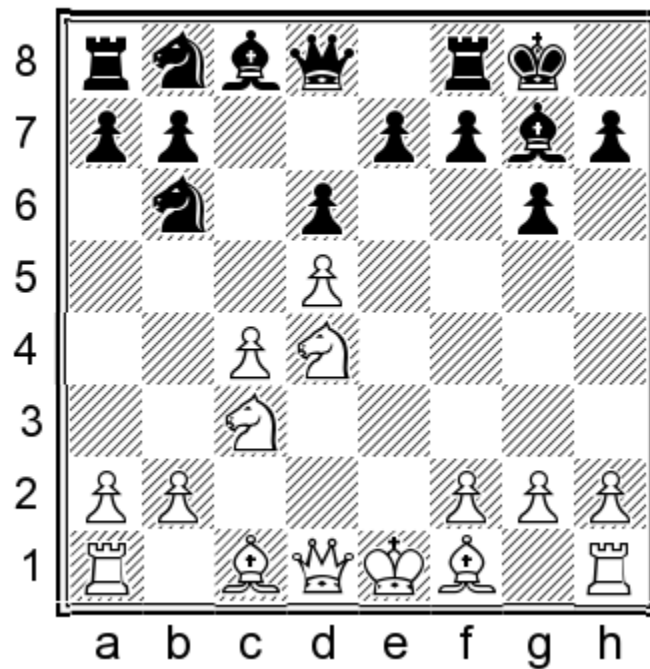


■ *The unbalanced character of the opening promises a sharp middlegame. With what prophylaxis can Black start before focusing on his active kingside options?*

Show/Hide Solution

10...a5 11.0-0 Na6

White's natural play is connected with the c4-c5 break. Having slowed this idea down, Black will then reroute his b6-knight b6 to c5 and try to launch an assault on the kingside.



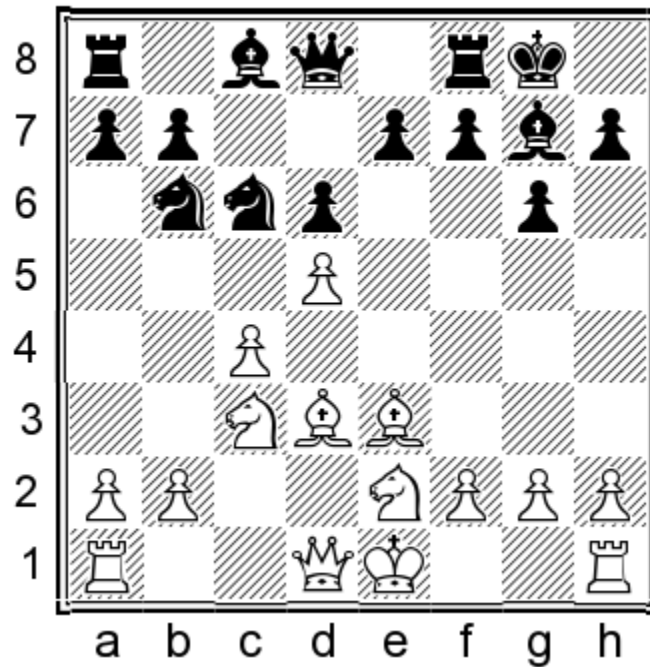
■ *White has neglected his development, moving his d-pawn and king's knight twice instead of hurrying to castle. Act energetically to underline the downside of that approach!*

Show/Hide Solution

9...e5! 10.dxe6 Nc6

Black temporarily invests a pawn to oust his opponent's centralized knight and speed up his development.

11.exf7+ Rxf7©



■ *A deceptively simple position. White has just hit our knight: where should it hop to?*

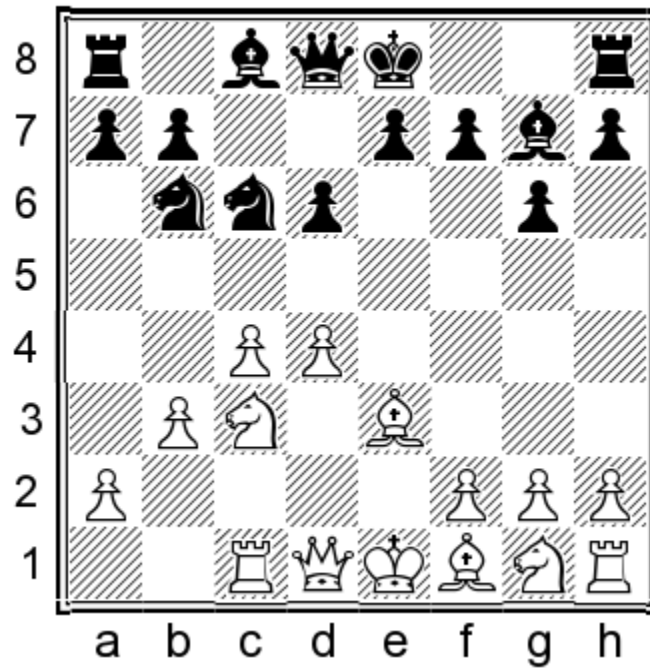
Show/Hide Solution

10...Nb4

10...Ne5?! 11.b3 is worse.

10...Nb4 11.b3 e6 12.dxe6 Bxe6

Black is ready for the break ...d6-d5 and the difference with 10...Ne5?! becomes clear: White doesn't have Bd3-e4 available here.



■ 8...Nc6 has superseded the usual 8...0-0 and White has reacted in the same vein. How to underline the difference?

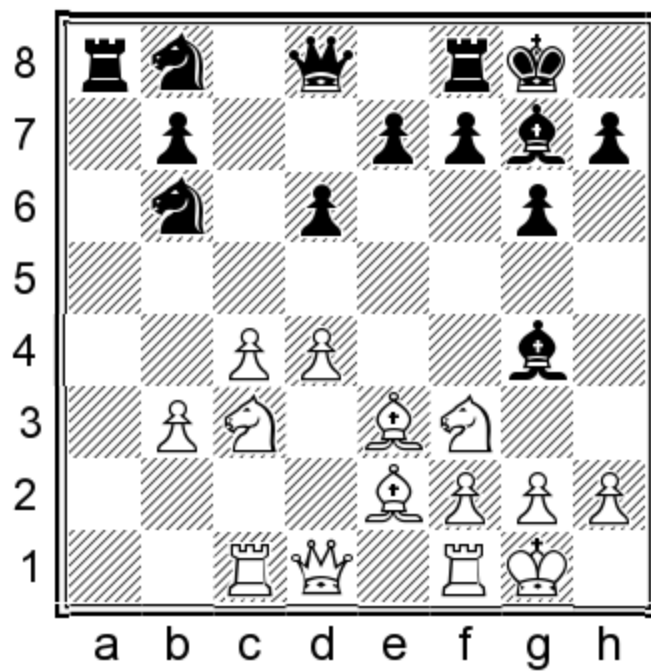
Show/Hide Solution

9...d5 10.c5 e5!

That is it! This little bomb blasts away the white center.

Show in Text Mode

24



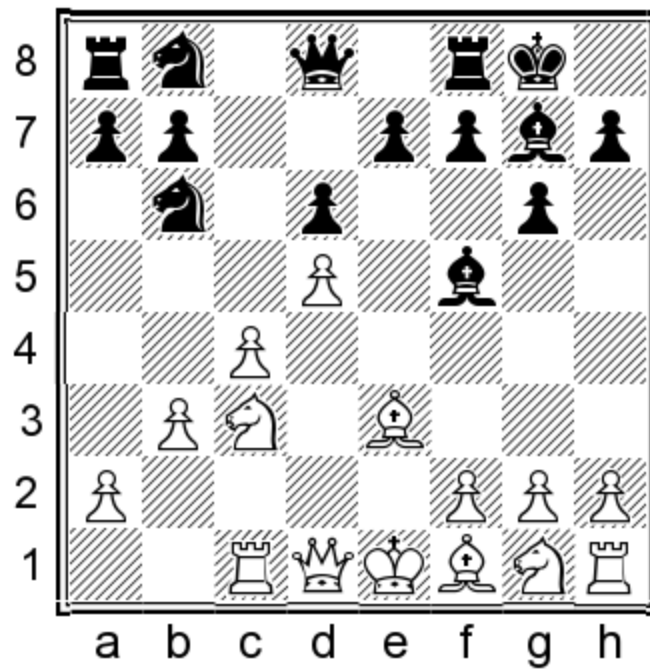
■ What is the most appropriate continuation for Black at this point?

Show/Hide Solution

13...d5 14.c5 Nc8

Black's plan involves ...Nc6, ...e6, ...Bxf3 and then ...N8e7-f5.

25

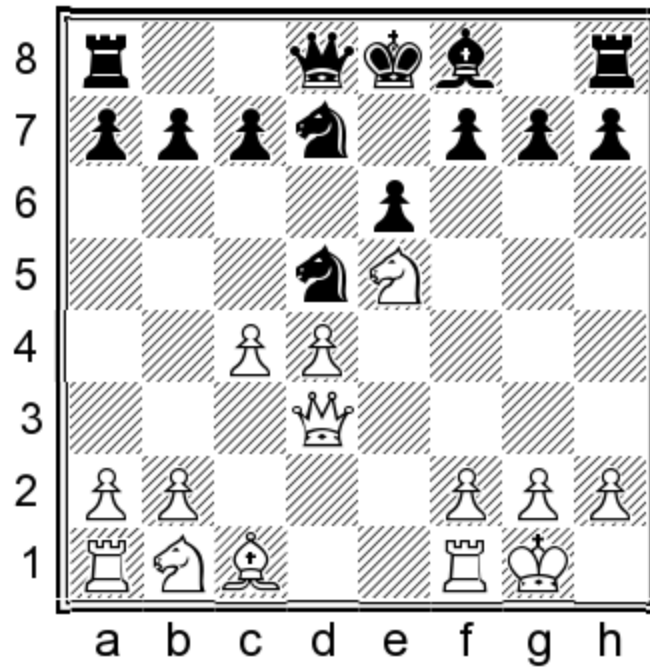


■ *White's previous move could be troublesome for Black if he does not have an adequate remedy to it. Which one?*

Show/Hide Solution

10...e6! 11.dxe6 Bxe6

Black will soon follow up with the liberating break ...d6-d5. His point is 11.g4 Bxc3+ 12.Rxc3 Be4 13.f3 Bxd5!.



■ *Show why White's last move (9.c4) was premature!*

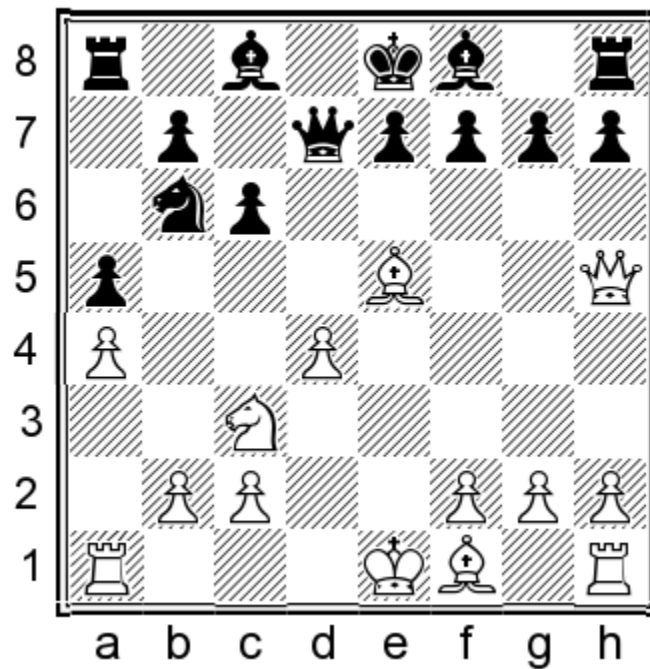
Show/Hide Solution

9...Nxe5 10.dxe5 Nb4 11.Qe4

White attacks b7 while keeping an eye on c2.

11...Bc5!=

Black has ideas of ...Qd3 or ...Qd4.

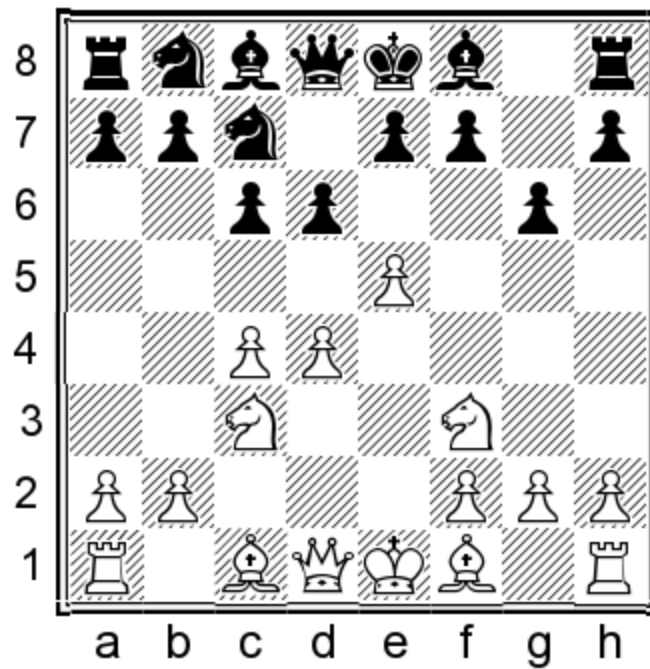


□ After the dubious 4...Nb6 and White's flawless play Black's faulty last move (10...Qd7?) is too much for his position to bear. White to play and win!

Show/Hide Solution

11.Nb5! Nd5 12.Bc4

White threatens 13.Bxd5 followed by 14.Nc7+: Black is overwhelmed.



□ What is now the easiest way for White to gain a stable opening advantage?

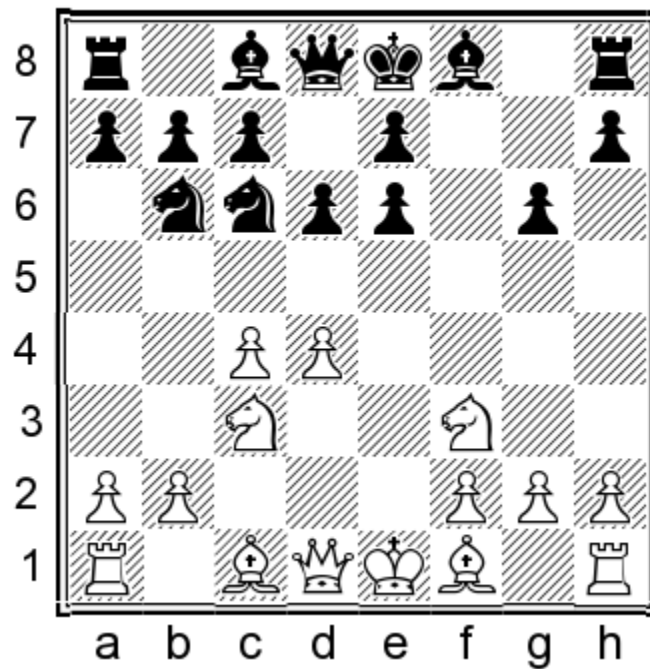
Show/Hide Solution

7.exd6 Qxd6

Or 7...exd6 and now 8.d5, 8.Bg5 Be7 9.Bh6 Bf8 10.Qd2 and 8.Qe2+, intending 8...Qe7 9.Ne4!, are all quite nice for White.

8.Be3²

White has a space advantage and easy development: Be2, Qd2, 0-0, Rad1 and so on.

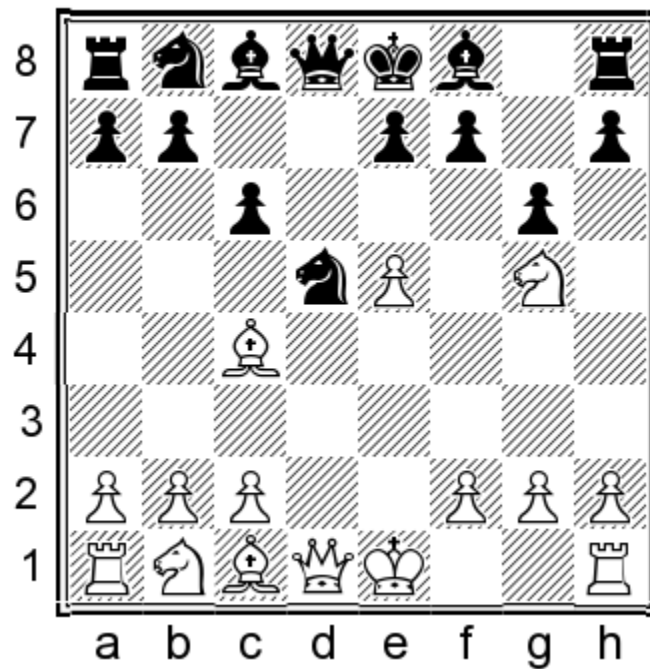


□ What is White's most precise way to extract an opening edge from the current position?

Show/Hide Solution

8.h4 Bg7 9.Be3!²

White anticipates the sequence ...e6-e5 d5 ...Nd4, which generally lightens the pressure on Black's position. He is ready then to carry on with h4-h5.



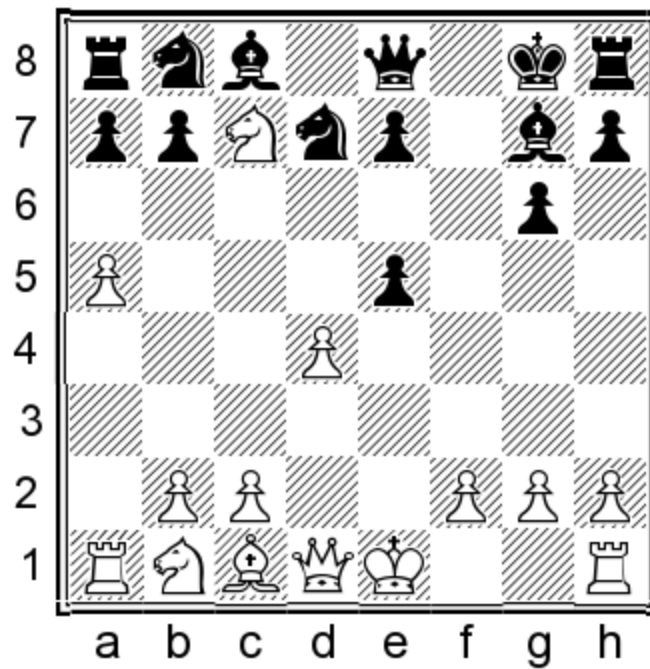
■ *How should Black carry on?*

Show/Hide Solution

7...Bg7

The most natural is the best! True, after 8.e6 Bxe6 9.Nxe6 fxe6

White gets fairly reasonable compensation for his sacrificed pawn, but the mighty d5-knight ensures that Black is not worse. Besides ...0-0, the moves ...Qd6 and then ...Nd7 are on his agenda.



■ *How does the main line run now and can Black deviate from it?*

Show/Hide Solution

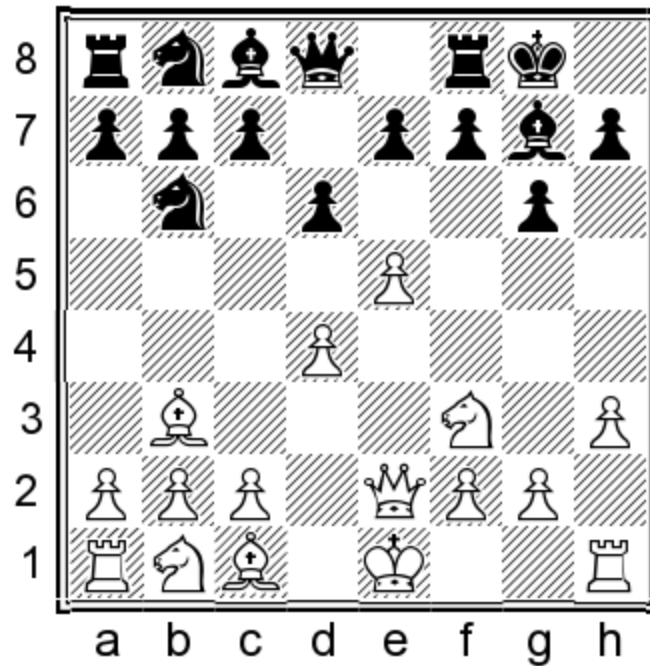
12...Qd8

12...Qf7 Is the alternative, when after 13.Nxa8 Black angles for the same setup as in the main line: 13...exd4 14.0-0 Na6 followed by ...h6, ...Kh7, ...Nf6 and ...Bf5.

12...Qd8 13.Nxa8 exd4 14.c3 h6

14...Nc5!? also exists.

15.cxd4 Nf6 16.Nc3 Kh7[∞]



■ *The prophylactic 8.h3, directed against ...Bc8-g4, has the drawback of costing White a valuable tempo. Which trendy move has replaced the old 8...a5 and 8...Nc6?*

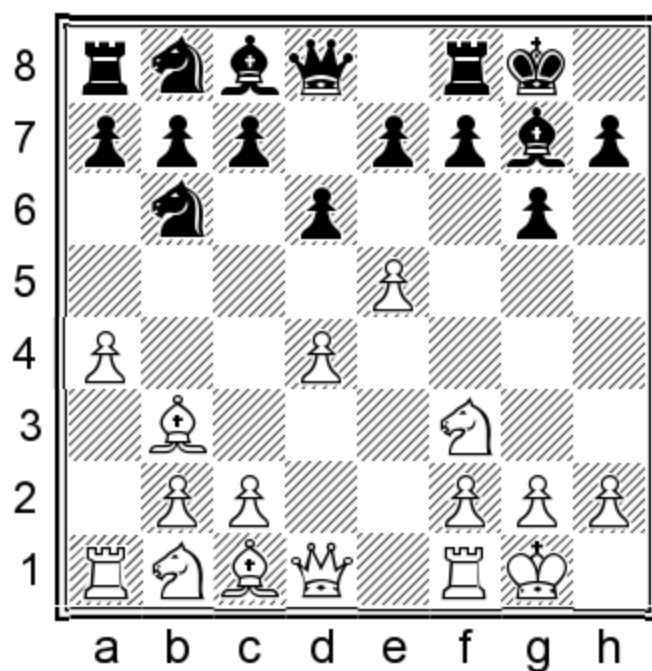
Show/Hide Solution

8...c5!

Black increases his central influence with this push.

9.dxc5 dxc5 10.0-0 c4!? 11.Bxc4 Nxc4 12.Qxc4 Nc6©

This fashionable position has occurred a few times by now, with Black achieving a respectable score.



■ What is Black's best reaction to his opponent's last move (8.a4)?

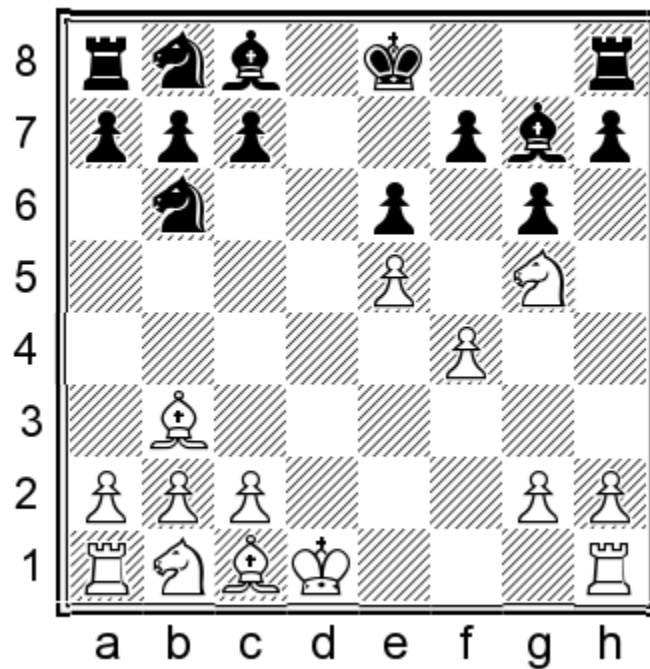
Show/Hide Solution

8...dxe5

This is rightly considered the principled continuation by Kornev, while 8...a5 9.Re1 or 9.exd6 exd6 10.Bg5 are slightly better for White.

8...dxe5 9.Nxe5 c5 10.a5 N6d7 11.Ng4 e6

With mutual chances.



■ *Black has several ways to treat this ending. Which one is the most enterprising?*

Show/Hide Solution

10...a5

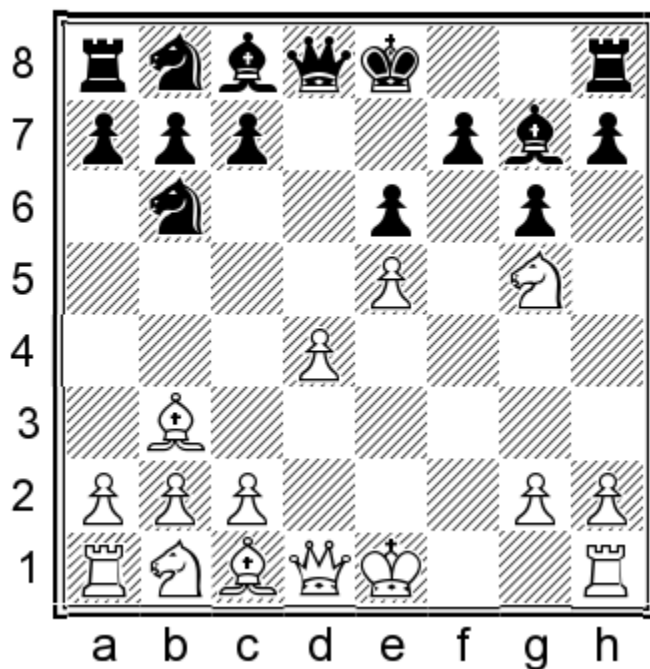
As often, probing the white bishop when it has landed on b3 is a smart idea. After the natural

11.a4

Black will put his own bishop on the long diagonal, follow up with ...N8d7 (or ...Na6) and soon question the knight on g5. He is by no means worse.

11...Bd7 12.Ke2 Bc6

And so on.



■ Most of the time $9...c5$ and $9...0-0$ will lead to the same thing, but castling allows White an extra option. What is that option, and how should Black counter it?

Show/Hide Solution

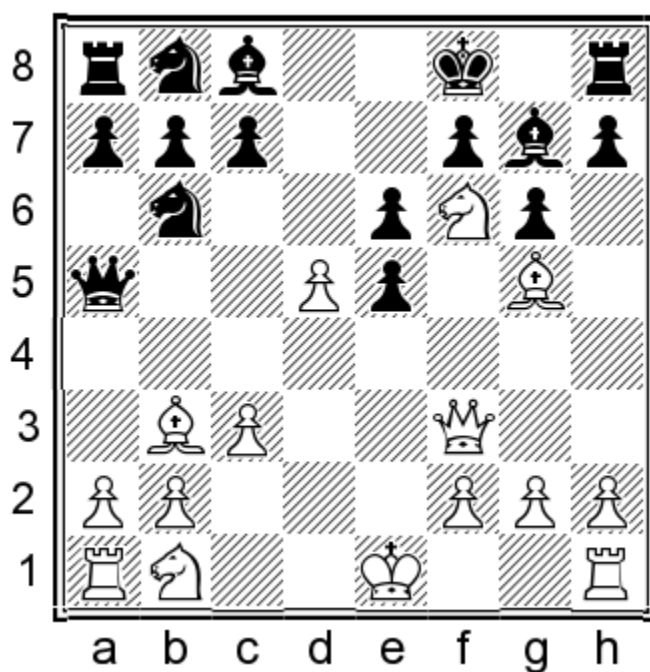
9...0-0

Castling does not immediately put pressure on the d4-pawn, which leaves White a bit more freedom.

10.Qg4 c5

The c-pawn push appears logical, but in the three correspondence games where this position was reached Black preferred 10...a5. This is therefore my (and Kornev's) recommendation, intending to continue with ...c7-c5 only after White has dealt with the threat of ...a5-a4; see the relevant section.

36



■ *White sacrificed a pawn for a dangerous initiative. How to defuse it?*

Show/Hide Solution

13...e4!

This move disturbs the harmony among the white forces and helps the queen defend along the fifth rank in some lines. White should then choose

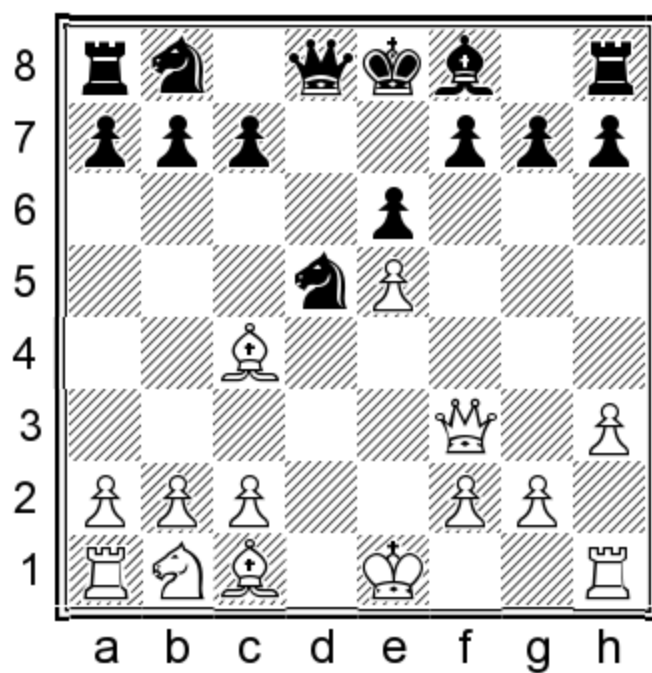
between 14.Qg3 Na6! 15.dxe6 Bxe6 16.Bxe6 h6!

and

14.Nxe4 exd5 15.Bf4!

with an unclear game in both cases.

37



■ *White has opted for the rare 5.dxe5 and Black has reacted sensibly. How to develop now?*

Show/Hide Solution

8...Nd7

Starting with 8...c6 comes to the same thing, while 8...Nc6 is also valid.

9.Qe4

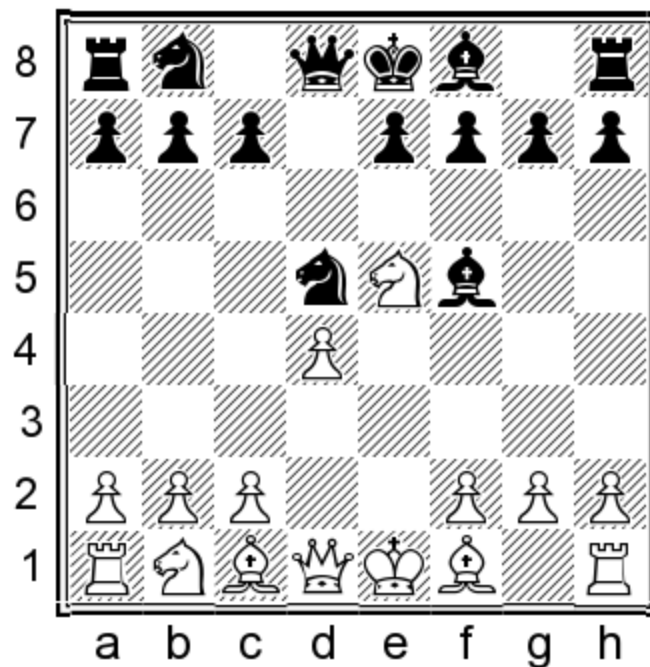
A) 9.Qg3!?

B) 9.Bxd5? Nxe5!μ

9...c6∞

Black will follow up with ...Qc7 and then he has a choice between a setup involving queenside castling or ...Be7, possibly ...b7-b5, and ... 0-0.

38



□ What is White's best way to draw profit from the suspicious 5...Bf5?

Show/Hide Solution

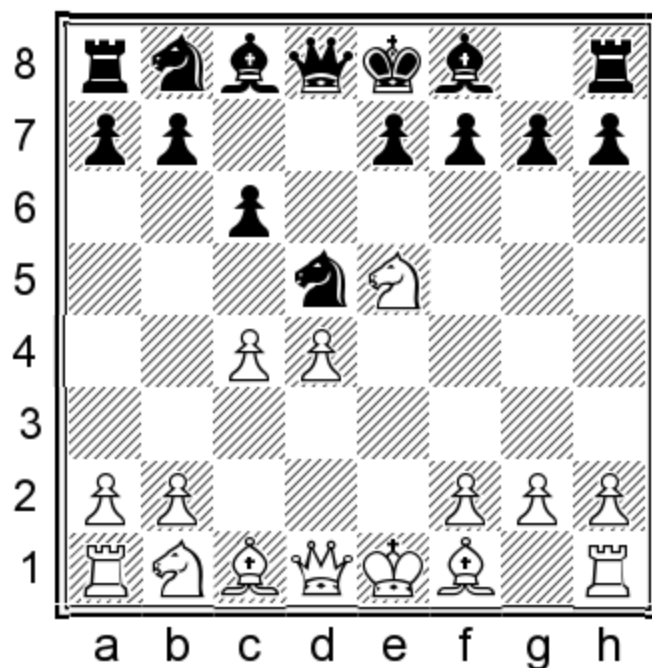
6.c4 Nf6

6...Nb4 7.Qa4+ N4c6 8.d5 This is a bit tricky, but ultimately much better for White.

7.Nc3 Nbd7 8.Qf3±

White will simply grab the b7-pawn.

39



■ Punish White's mistake (6.c4?)!

Show/Hide Solution

6...Nb4!

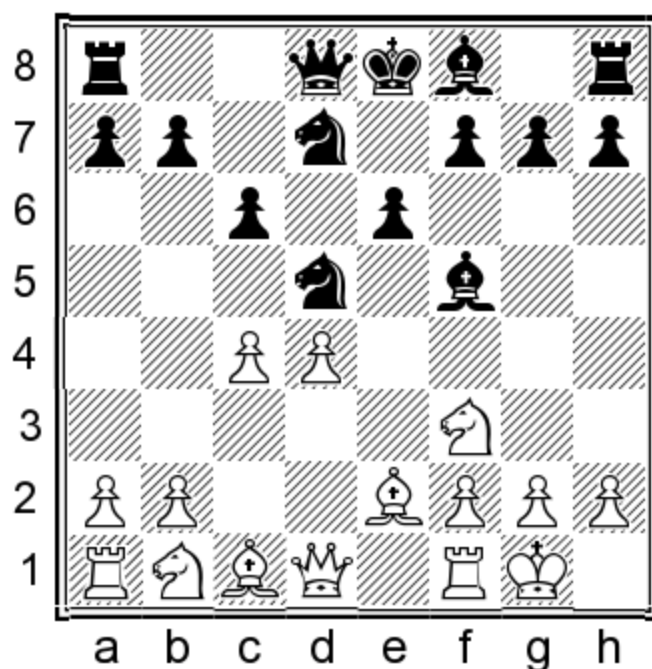
The immediate threat is 7...Qxd4 followed by the fork 8...Nc2+. In the event of 7.Be3 Bf5 8.Nd3

the energetic

8...e5!

grants Black the initiative.

40



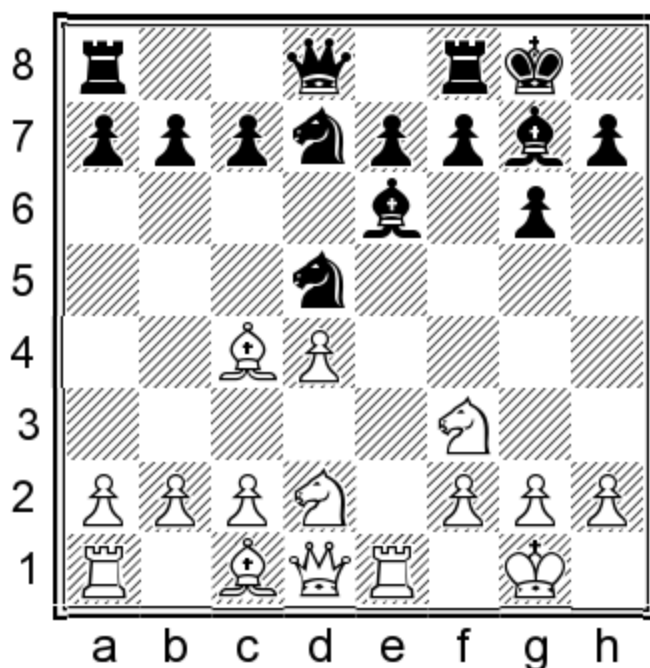
■ *Should Black retreat his knight (and if yes, to which square?) or jump forward to b4?*

Show/Hide Solution

9...N5f6!

This is the right reply, when White can hope for a small pull but not more. After the inappropriate 9...Nb4?! White gains a marked edge thanks to 10.a3! Nc2 11.Ra2 Nxd4 12.Qxd4 Bxb1 [12...c5 13.Qc3 doesn't change much] 13.Bg5 f6 14.Rxb1 fxg5 15.Rd1±.

41



■ What should Black avoid at this stage?

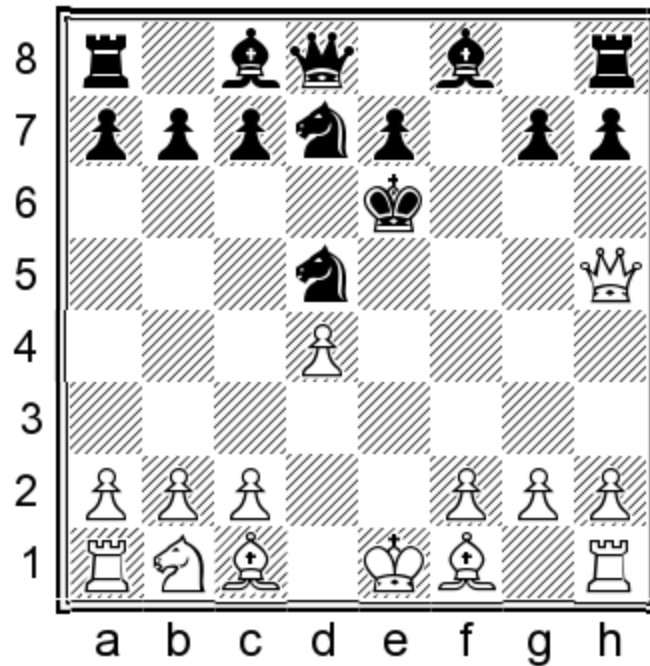
Show/Hide Solution

10...N7f6?!

Now White can play the powerful exchange sacrifice 11.Rxe6 fxe6 12.Qe1f as in the Grischuk – Riazantsev duel. Black should therefore opt for 10...N7b6 11.Bf1 Bf5, when he stands a bit worse in a complex

middlegame where any result remains possible.

42



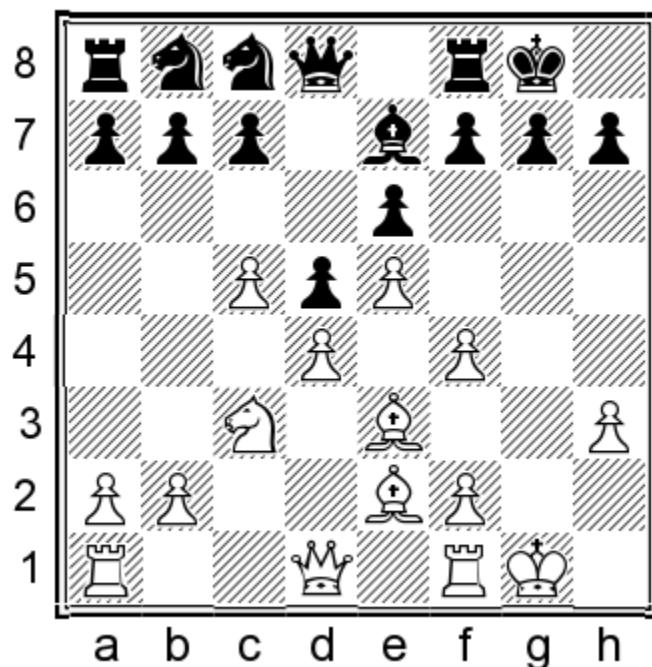
□ White has correctly entered the refutation of 5...Nd7. What are the two branches of this ambitious choice?

Show/Hide Solution

8.c4 N5f6 9.d5+ Kd6 10.Qf7 Ne5 11.Bf4 c5 12.Nc3

This is the start of the main line. Some knowledge is needed but basically Black should end up clearly worse.

Less forced variations arise after 8.g3, when the best black attempts consist of 8...b5 and 8...N7f6 9.Bh3+ Kd6 10.Qe5+ Kc6 11.Bg2 and so on.



■ *How would Black like to continue and should he take time to stop the f4-f5 push with 13...g6?*

Show/Hide Solution

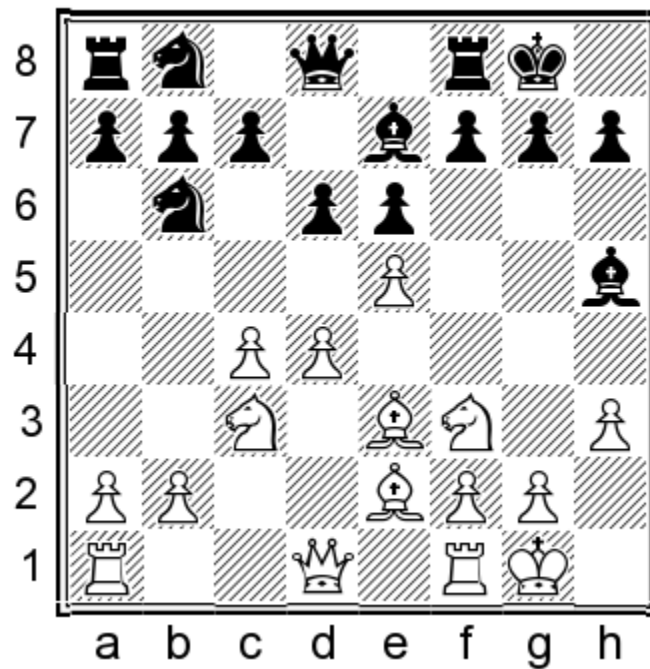
Ideally Black would like to play ...Nc6, ...Bh4 and then something like ...g6 followed by ...N8e7-f5. One problem is that White is rather quick on the kingside, which prompts Black to play the defensive and not necessarily desirable ...f7-f5.

13...g6?

This is not enough to discourage White from a kingside attack; on the contrary.

14.f5! exf5 15.Qb3 or **14...gxf5 15.Kh2 Kh8 16.Rg1** Black is overwhelmed on the kingside, for instance **16...Bh4 17.Ba6!! Nxa6 18.Qh5+–**.

44



■ *What is the drawback of pushing the a-pawn now one or two square(s) forward?*

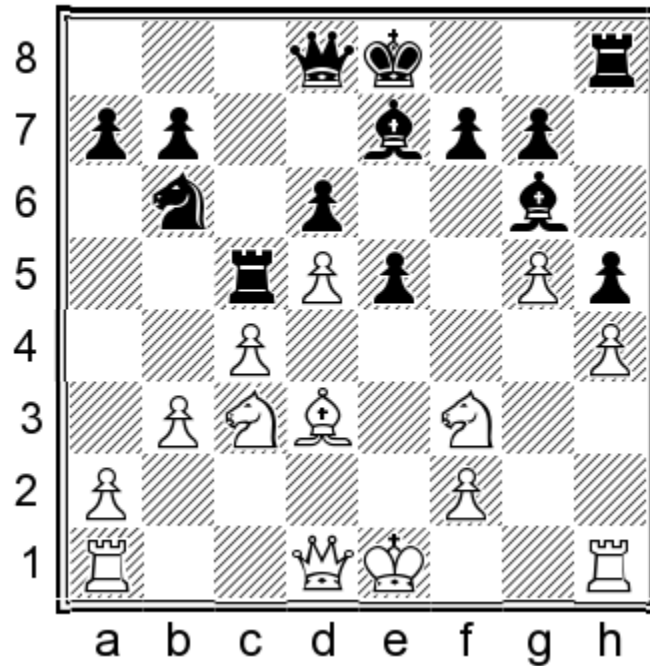
Show/Hide Solution

10...a6

10...a5 is useful if White goes for the casual 11.b3, when 11...d5 is Black's standard reply. The defect of Black's concept lies in the swap 11.exd6 cxd6 followed by 12.Qb3 and the knight is loose on b6. After his queen move

White threatens c4-c5 (d4-d5 could also be a nuisance) and stands clearly on top.

45



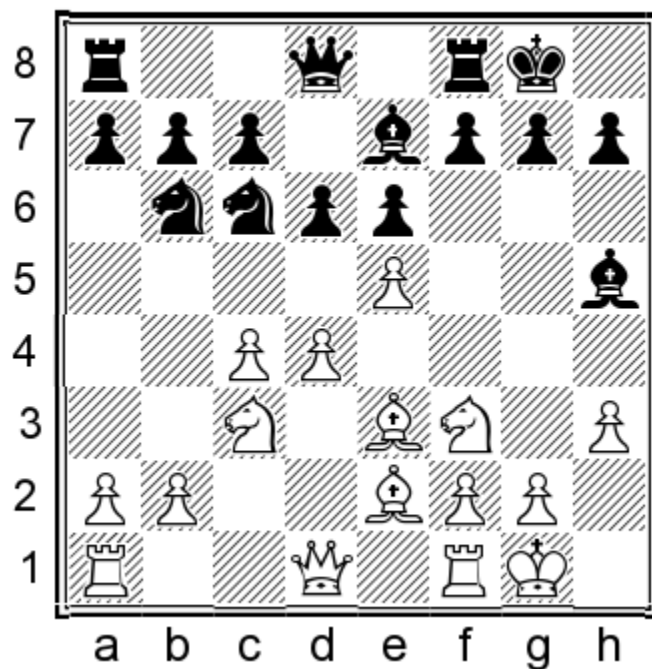
■ *White has achieved his strategic aim of controlling the important e4-square. How to continue as Black?*

Show/Hide Solution

17...0-0!

White will swap the light-squared bishops and install his knight on e4 anyway, but by allowing 18.Bxg6 fxg6

rather than exchanging himself on d3, Black hopes to get some counterplay along the f-file.



□ How does White obtain a stable plus from the current position?

Show/Hide Solution

11.exd6

The easiest way to annoy Black.

11...cxd6 12.d5!

Now either

12...exd5 13.Nxd5 Nxd5 14.Qxd5

when thanks to the inclusion of h3 and ...Bh5 White wins a precious tempo on the enemy bishop, or 12...Bxf3 13.Bxf3 Ne5 14.dxe6 fxe6 15.Bg4² with b2-b3 to follow in order to protect c4.